

**THE ISSUE OF SEPARATION:
ON RACE AND THE RACIAL ECCLESIOLOGY
OF THE CHURCH OF GOD**

by

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ABSTRACT

The Issue of Separation: On Race and the Racial Ecclesiology of the Church of God

Florida has and always will be at the heart of the racial struggle in the classical Pentecostal denomination, the Church of God. From its beginning, it has been the trailblazer and beacon of black leadership within the Church of God. This has been the case ever since the appointment of Edmond Barr. Most major American black leaders in the Church of God has either come from Florida or have moved to Florida at some point in their ministerial career. Therefore, any measure to deal with racial separation must directly engage the black church in Florida, as the Florida church stands as the last iron curtain of segregation in the church.

The historical background of the issue of separation in the Church of God exposes the nature of the church. In every town in Florida where there is a white church, there is also a black church.

What about the Christian identity in which all are united under the color of Christ's blood which is neither white nor black?

Yet, it is not that simple, as this study will show through the narrative of the Church of God in the state of Florida which yielded a Church of two distinct groups, one black and the other white. What is surprising is that the two groups still exist as separate operational congregations within the Church of God denomination while other states have long integrated since the civil rights era. As well as providing a detailed history of the establishing of the Church of God in Florida and then the occurrence of the two separate churches (Florida-

Tampa and Florida-Cocoa) this study will explore the social nuances of why such division arose and why it is still occurring in the 21st century. Finally, this study will offer a way forward for the issue in Florida and offer suggestions for a path toward unity and renewed fellowship.

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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the racial separation of the Church of God in Florida that occurred in the early twentieth century as the Church of God began its expansion throughout the American South. The thesis examines historically the ecclesiology and polity of this classical Pentecostal denomination in an attempt to discover and dissect the issue of race that continues to divide the denomination in the “Sunshine State” (Florida). Little work has been done on the subject and no significant work exists; therefore, this thesis aims to give a clearer picture of the history, context, and social/ecclesiastical paradigms of the continuing racial separation.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to provide the framework for this study. This will be done by enquiring into the background of the study, followed by the social underpinnings and context in which this study has been performed. The introductory chapter ends with pertinent questions that drive the rest of the study.

1.1. BACKGROUND

In 1926, a group of Negro ministers ‘strong’ and ‘determined’ addressed the Church of God General Assembly at the auditorium in Cleveland, Tennessee and announced with much seriousness and sensitivity:

We feel... somewhat embarrassed and handicapped to the extent we cannot make much progress that we really desire, and we are asking you brethren, with the consent

*of all our brethren present at this Assembly, if there can be a way formulated by which we can arrange better to take care of our affairs among the colour work.*¹

In the presence of this predominantly white assembly, the black ministers' fortitude was strengthened by confidence in their white counterparts to understand the social pressures of the southern parts of the United States, where the majority of the black churches operated. The assembly responded to the request by approving a measure that allowed the black constituency to hold their own annual assembly. Such was the case of most North American Pentecostal groups who acceded to the racial mores of the time and failed at integration.

Dr. Charles W. Conn, Church of God historian who chronicles the narrative of the Church of God movement from 1886-1976, writes about the 1926 decision by the Church of God General Assembly to allow the blacks to form their own Assembly: "this was not to be a separation of the white and black work, for both would continue together to form the General Assembly of the Church of God."² However, the forming of a separate black assembly can be seen as separation in its purest and simplest form. Black attendance at the General Assembly dwindled after the 1926 decision to allow blacks the creation of a separate Assembly; this further lessens black participation in the governing of the church through the voting process of the General Assembly.

1.2. SOCIAL CONTEXT

Being a black Christian during the era of segregation, Jim Crow laws demanded a certain degree of restraint and trust in the surrounding community of believers to act in a manner diametrically opposite to that relative to the majority of society. It often required

¹ Charles W. Conn, *Like A Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God 1886-1976*. Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1977, p. 199.

² Conn, p. 200.

ownership of one's own in order to see that the interests of that community were promoted and treated without bias.

Therefore, for many, this meant breaking away from society's norms in order to move forward toward the hope and promise of equality for all. During the early days of itinerant travelling preachers, black ministers received little or no pay and had to rely exclusively on the care of the congregation to which they preached. They often gave more than they received on their preaching endeavours, paying their way to meetings, buying food along the way, and sleeping wherever it was most economical. To support themselves and their families, many of them also farmed, performed janitorial work, and were employed as construction workers.

Some probably would rather have been lawyers, doctors, engineers, or scientists—anything but preachers—had they not been so restricted by discrimination. For others, they were compelled by a calling and therefore devoted their lives to selfless service.

For the black faction of the Church of God in Florida, the approach of voluntary segregation for their churches and their leadership was perceived as a risk worth taking in order to win the fight against a sociology of prejudice and racism that infiltrated the church both organizationally and locally.

In comparison to the white churches, the blacks saw their churches as irredeemably second rate. In addition, outside of the church, the public spaces and institutions in the Southern United States were segregated by laws that had been formulated by whites. These laws codified and systematized discrimination. They symbolized a refusal by whites to associate with blacks on the basis of equality. Segregation explicitly expressed that African Americans were inferior people.

The Church's theology found itself in a losing battle against the dominant society of the day. Many churches held separate services for black members, either before or after their main service. Blacks often held their services in separate parts of the church rather than in the

main sanctuary, such as in dining areas or the classrooms used for Sunday school. If black members were lucky enough to join white churches in their main services, it was often required they be seated in the back or on the balcony.

Segregated churches were a part of a broader sphere of racism known as “Jim Crow”—a set of strictly enforced policies that severely discriminated against blacks in virtually all aspects of their lives. Church traditions were just as much a part of that system as sharecropping procedures, job discrimination, restricted voting rights, mandatory segregation on public transportation, racial divisions in dining establishments and lynching..

However, it was not so much discriminatory ‘separateness’ that vexed black members of the Church of God as it was the principle of legal segregation and the denial of ministry promotion and funds that accompanied it. The primary concern of voluntary segregation was to advance the black work and its voice within the Church, not to separate blacks from whites. Blacks approved of and favoured the potential for maintaining the cultural identity of their community that segregation fostered. However, they very much *disliked* being treated as second-rate people and being given no representation at higher levels of their churches.

When the late 1960s brought about the integration of schools and public spaces, black ministers and church members in Florida experienced great ambivalence.³ On the one hand, they greatly welcomed the removal of Jim Crow laws. However, they were also very reluctant to relinquish the freedom and control they had acquired by taking ownership of their own work. The Church has always functioned as the institutional, emotional, spiritual, and social anchor of black American life. Furthermore, the Black Church functioned as a training ground for Black leadership that provided a launching pad for leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rev. Jesse Jackson, Ralph David Abernathy, etc. This was just as true prior to segregation, during segregation, as well as after segregation.

³ The reversal of practices of segregation was a result of the famous legal case *Brown vs. The Board of Education* where the United States Supreme Court found segregation illegal on the basis of race.

Imagine the diminishing of power for the black preacher and church within their own community. The psychological ramifications would be great. The discontinuation of the black-led and black-operated Church would drastically alter the position of the preacher in the community. Ever since the advent of “praise houses” on plantations in which slaves worshipped and held services, the black preacher has exhorted, instructed, and guided the community.⁴ Segregation—whether voluntary or imposed—fostered solidarity and black leadership. Since Reconstruction, black preachers served as community leaders, organizers, diplomats, surrogates, and the voice of blacks.

On the one hand, integration would undermine those functions and diminish the relative status of black preachers. The greatest obstacle to integration is identity and fear of the loss thereof. To a far greater extent than their white counterparts, black preachers had identified with their communities. Due in part to a multitude of reasons, one of the most important was that since black ministers were seldom if ever considered for promotion to higher levels of the church hierarchy, they remained in leadership positions at their local churches for much longer than the average white minister. This long tenure and the social function performed by such black preachers gave them deeper ties to the members of their congregation and community. Although operating with fewer resources, segregation produced a special commitment among black preachers that helped to compensate for poor buildings, scanty equipment, and lack of funds. In the eyes of the community, many black churches owed their existence and progress to the vision and sacrifice of the black preachers.

1.3 PURPOSE OF STUDY

⁴ “Praise House,” The New Georgia Encyclopaedia.
<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Multimedia.jsp?id=m-8797#> (retrieved April 2009).

This study is neither a summation of segregation nor an acclamation on black preachers. Rather, it chronicles and analyses the Church of God movement in Florida with respect to separate Church communities under one denominational framework. While the story has been told in part with brief references in Conn's authoritative work on the history of the Church of God, *Like a Mighty Army*, the only work that exists that provides an in-depth investigation of the history of the Church of God in Florida and the issue of segregation that has separated the white and black constituency of the state is *Reclaiming our Heritage: The Search for Black History in the Church of God* produced by Joseph E. Jackson in 1993.⁵ Jackson's work takes a closer look at why and how black history has been neglected in the Church of God while this study seeks to examine the issue of racial separation within the historical overview of blacks in the Church of God.

There are several factors that contribute to the uniqueness of this study. First, the two Church communities in Florida (Black American and White American); still operate separately today as they did when first segregated over fifty years ago. Secondly, in contrast to other black churches formed during the Jim Crow era; which separated completely from their parent denomination, the black constituency of Florida remained a part of the Church of God 'without' leaving the denomination. One final factor that makes this study unique is that there has never been an open dialogue about this issue, or a written narrative about the causes that have led to the segregation and also the issues that keeps this segregation 'going.' This study has the potential to launch such dialogue and open discussion within a denomination that has much to grapple with in terms of culture and race. This is especially owing to the fact that most of the Church of God membership is concentrated in the same Southern areas of the

⁵Joseph E. Jackson, *Reclaiming our Heritage: The Search for Black History in the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Black Ministries, 1993) .Other substantial works that deals with the Church of God include Mickey Crews, *The Church of God: A Social History* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1993); and R. David Muir, *Black Theology, Pentecostalism, and Racial Struggles in the Church of God*. (PhD. Dissertation Univ. of London: King's College, 2003.)

United States in which Jim Crow and segregation policies originated and were most intensively practiced.

A study of the Church of God in Florida is indispensable for understanding how whites and blacks interacted and coexisted during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It further highlights how the black church in Florida came into being and coped with the challenges of racism and prejudice.

Chronicling the odyssey of the Church of God in Florida from the establishment of the first church at Tampa in 1909 to the condition of the church a hundred years later is a daunting undertaking

The thousands of men and women who toiled in little storefront churches with little more than prayers and hope deserve to have their stories told, as much as do high profile figures credited with starting entire Church denominations and movements. In this work, the stories of such early Pentecostal pioneers like Edmond S. Barr; the first black missionary in the Church of God who was present at the famous camp meetings at Pleasant Grove in Tampa will be presented. Also important to the narrative of the Church of God in Florida is R.M. Evans, a retired Methodist who helped to bring the Church of God in Florida into being. This he did by inviting General Overseer A.J. Tomlinson to Pleasant Grove in 1909, which resulted in the establishing of the first Church of God congregation in the state. Also examined will be the untold story of the racial split of the Church of God in Florida that occurred in 1966. With the support of court documents and personal testimonies the story will finally be told, or at least revealed.

1.4 BLACK LEADERSHIP AND THE CHURCH OF GOD (CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE)

The narrative of the Church of God (COG) in Florida is a history best understood if it is told in full. Black ambivalence over integration can be seen as ambiguous unless one investigates the origins of the Church of God in Florida and the emergence of the black church in the early twentieth century. The distinctiveness of the black church in Florida allows us to include many members of the black community such as African Americans, Jamaicans, Haitians, and Bahamians. However, Bahamians would figure prominently in the early history of the Church of God in Florida. From 1910 onward, COG ministers sponsored various mission trips to the Bahamas—beginning with R.M. Evans and Barr.⁶

Separateness was not wholly the creation of white racism, and as we shall observe, it was at least partially black-initiated in this case. This was because many blacks preferred to be led by members of their own ethnic community, even on the district and state levels of the church. It is a truism that church government is deeply political. In the American South, where race issues were enormously prevalent and even violent, the link between church governance and politics was brutally clear. Black ministers were on the front lines in battles over leadership.

Reading about the life of Charles W. Conn—the crowded two bedroom house, children wearing second hand clothes, rough discipline, many nights away from home on the mission field—one would be hard pressed to distinguish the subjects' race.⁷ The obvious difference between white and black ministers in churches is that the latter had less of everything and were treated as second class in both society and church. Conn once said that

⁶ Janet Spencer; edited by Celia Marcelle and Catherine J. Robinson. *Black Women in the Church: Historical Highlights and Profiles* (Pittsburgh: Magna Graphics Inc., 1986), p. 29.

⁷ J. Stephen Conn writes a candid story about growing up as a Pentecostal believer in the home of a Pentecostal preacher; see *Growing up Pentecostal* (Longwood: Xulon Press, 2006).

whatever the difficulty white preachers faced, black preachers had it doubled.⁸ However, a history of the Church of God in Florida that was concerned solely with the material disparities between the white and black church would fail to reveal how black ministers acted as leaders in the communities. It is this community leadership role which reinforced the need for a black-owned ministry.

1.5 BLACK NATIONALISM AND PRIDE

The idea of black ownership arose with the rise of Black Nationalism during the nineteenth century, which was in turn a response to a segregated culture that supported inequality. The likes of Lewis Woodson, Henry McNeal Turner, and Martin Delany preached that the black community had taken ownership of its culture and life through owning businesses, schools, churches, and other institutions for and supported by the black community; a principle of Black Nationalism.⁹ As with other sociological epithets, the idea of black ownership found its way into the church. Many black churches found themselves taking their wellbeing into their own hands.

The criticism of black nationalistic ideologies has generally been that it masquerades as black supremacy in disguise and can easily give way to an attitude of black superiority. Nigerian-born professor of history and director of the African American Studies program at the University of Montana, Tunde Adeleke, argues in his book *“UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth- Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission,”* that 19th-century black American nationalism embodied the racist and paternalistic values of Euro-American culture and that black nationalist plans were not designed for the immediate benefit of Africans but

⁸ I interviewed Conn in 2005 at his home for an article I was writing for the *Evangel* in which he expressed these sentiments.

⁹ Floyd Miller, *The Father of Black Nationalism, Civil War History*, vol. 17, no. 4 (December 1971).

to enhance the fortunes of the leaders of certain groups.¹⁰ Adeleke further criticizes the imperial motives and the concept of a “civilizing mission” operating within Black Nationalist thought that aided in “shaping and legitimizing European imperialism of Africa.”¹¹

However, what took place in Florida was vastly different from an attitude of Black Nationalism, albeit similar in many respects. It was different in that the blacks did not propagate a sense of racial supremacy or hate like many Black Nationalists did, such as the Reactionary Black Nationalists (RBNs), who during the 1920’s often preached that “whites were devils.”¹² But they were similar in that they did espouse principles of self-love, self-respect, self-acceptance, self-help, pride, and solidarity.

In the Christian community during the post-Reconstruction era (Reconstruction era is a reference to the time period in the United States following the ending of the Civil War in 1864) and in the Church of God in particular, disenfranchisement eliminated office holding by blacks, leaving the black churches voiceless at the highest levels of decision-making.

Works that deal with any topic related to blackness often place great emphasis on the importance of black initiative, and blacks’ desire to control their own institutions. But the truth is, while many black churches were and continue to be self-reliant, in the days of public separateness, white churches provided much-needed assistance to the black work, and many black-populated mission fields benefited from the selflessness of white missionaries. R.M. Evans is an example of such; he was a missionary who sold his home in Durant, Florida and livestock consisting of a few cows, hogs, and chickens, to evangelize the Bahamas for the Church of God.¹³ Conn writes: “With the money from these, he bought a wagon and team of mules, which he and his wife drove more than three hundred miles to Miami, where he stored

¹⁰ Tunde Adeleke, *Unafrikan Americans: Nineteenth Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky 1998).

¹¹ Adeleke, p.59.

¹² Statements such as these were common among Black Nationalist leaders such as Malcolm X who famously taught that white people were a race of devils that were created by an evil scientist named Yakub.

¹³ Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, pg. 112.

the wagon and sold the mule. This provided passage to the Islands.”¹⁴ Evans even raised money for the Church of God’s first black minister, Edmond Barr, to return to the Bahamas to preach to his native people.¹⁵

The Florida-Cocoa position¹⁶ of self-governance and self-operating via separation from the predominantly whites churches of Florida-Tampa can also be viewed in a more positive light by functioning in a prophetic role, making a stand, a sort of last-hold. By resisting integration they felt they were protesting the inevitable oppression that will come if they submitted to integration.

1.6 SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND REGION AS A MODEL OF DIVERSE LEADERSHIP

In 1926, when a group of black ministers approached the General Assembly about creating an office by which their work could be supervised by someone who would put their voice and interest at the forefront, congregations from the North were opposed to the proposition.¹⁷ What is interesting is that when the black ministers were writing this request, it was not meant to be a separation of the black work from the General Assembly, but rather the black church would hold their Assembly in conjunction with the overall church. Space was to be given in the *Evangel* publication for advancing the interests of the blacks, especially their orphanage program.¹⁸ Secondly, the tithes of the black work would continue to be overseen by the office of the General-Secretary and Treasurer, but would be used only for the black

¹⁴ Conn, p. 112.

¹⁵ Conn, p. 112.

¹⁶ Florida-Cocoa refers to the administration and overall representation of the Churches of God under the Florida-Cocoa jurisdiction. The Church of God functions under two administrative state offices in the state of Florida—Florida Tampa a white majority and Florida-Cocoa a black majority.

¹⁷ Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, pg. 199.

¹⁸ Conn p. 200.

work. Thirdly, this new measure adopted at the General Assembly would allow the black churches to select their own national overseer.

Congregations in the North protested such a measure and F. J. Lee, General Overseer at the time, wrote to a prominent black minister in Pennsylvania:

In regard to the move that was made in the Assembly for the black people to host an Assembly of their own, I find it is not giving entire satisfaction. I have received several letters from the North...objecting to this. I think it suits the people of the South all right...

I wrote David LaFleur, overseer of the Negro Work...and he states that it would be all right for those who choose...to remain as they are, and, of course, that would leave [the white overseer] as their state overseer.

I have been advised that some of the churches of the North would not stand for the move, [so we] have given them the privilege of remaining...as they have been heretofore.¹⁹

Given the circumstances of that era, it is understandable why blacks in the South wanted to take ownership of their work. It was the Southern blacks who began the fight to free blacks from slavery and amended the Constitution to grant blacks freedom (13th Amendment), citizenship (14th Amendment) and the right to vote (15th Amendment).²⁰ Southern blacks pressured politicians to pass the civil rights laws of the 1860s, including the

¹⁹ Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, pp. 200-201.

²⁰ The Constitution of the United States, Articles 13, 14, and 15.

Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Reconstruction Act of 1867. These laws were designed to establish a new government system in the highly racist South that would be fair to blacks.²¹ Black Southerners also started the National Association for the Advancement of Colour People and affirmative action with President Richard Nixon's 1969 Philadelphia Plan which set the nation's first goals and timetables.²² Many blacks in the American South led the way on such issues because they directly affected them in the most harsh and abrasive ways.

Conditions in the North for Blacks were certainly far from perfect, but they did enjoy a higher level of harmony with the white community both in social and church circles. Moreover, the highly robust abolitionist movement in the north is historically noted. Simply stated, Jim Crow laws were in the South; therefore, it is also understandable why blacks in the North felt it unnecessary and invalid for the existence of the black Assembly. But some blacks in the South might wonder "why not at least join partially, retaining membership with both the white and black Assembly?" As blacks in the South saw it, the black churches in the North also lacked a voice and advocacy at general levels of the denomination.

What would happen if leadership was to be put in the hands of blacks? Southern New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island) is a good example of such a scenario where leadership was put in the hands of the black majority. Beginning with the Rev. Martin Wright with his appointment to the office of State Administrative Bishop on February 19, 1992, black leadership was born and flourished in the South New England (S.N.E) region. Ever since the leadership of Rev. Wright, at the state's highest office, blacks have been at the helm of church affairs in that area.²³ Bishop Jonathan Ramsey, the current Administrative Bishop, has served in his post for the past 12 years with much success, hence the longevity of

²¹ Francis Rice, "Why Martin Luther King Was Republican", <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=16500> (accessed April 2009).

²² Ibid.

²³ After an overwhelming vote by the State Council of Southern New England Church of God the Executive Committee appointed Wright as Administrative Bishop, thus, marking an incredible turning point in Church leadership in which Wright became the first Black Bishop of SNE.

his leadership. However, in Florida the blacks are in the minority compared to S.N.E., where the blacks comprised about 80% of the church population.²⁴ S.N.E. demonstrates the goal of diversity with its administrative levels. It would appear from the outside that for South New England, it is not an issue of black or white, but rather who is best able to serve the church in its various capacities.

S.N.E. leadership consists of people of multicultural backgrounds. Bishop Jonathan Ramsey is an African American. His wife, who serves as the region's Women's President, is also African American. The Youth and Christian Education Director is Omar George, who comes from Ontario, Canada and is of Asian Heritage. Eeva-Marie, George's wife, who serves as Girl's Club Coordinator, is from Finland. The Evangelism and Home Missions' director is Bishop Bruno Spade, who is of Hispanic orientation and has served the Church of God in Europe in various capacities. Audry Lovely, administrative secretary, is white, and is considered an indispensable source of church history and information for the S.N.E. areas.²⁵

Southern New England shows what it looks like for leadership to be put into the hands of the black majority starting with Martin Wright; the first black Administrative Bishop in S.N.E. What is of further interest is that not only does S.N.E. serve as a paradigm of successful minority leadership, but it has become the quintessential model of diversity and gender inclusivity in the Church of God.

It is not surprising that the S.N.E region has become a standard-bearer for racial and gender inclusivity. The regional community of New England is located in the north-eastern corner of the United States and is one of the earliest English settlements of the New World. Puritans, Pilgrims from Britain escaping religious persecution and oppression arrived in New

²⁴ This statistic was given by Audrey Lovely the Administrative secretary for S.N.E. April 2, 2009.

²⁵ Background information on members of Southern New England's leadership team was given in a phone interview I conducted with Audrey Lovely on April 2, 2009.

England in 1620, establishing the colony of Plymouth.²⁶ In the 19th century, New England would play an early and prominent role in the abolition of slavery. Not surprising, New England would feature notable routes within the Underground rail road network of the 19th century-Boston, Massachusetts; Charlemont, Massachusetts; and Farmington, Connecticut would serve as safe havens for fugitive slaves seeking freedom with the aid of sympathetic white northerners who believed in their cause.²⁷

Massachusetts abolished slavery completely in 1783; Rhode Island and Connecticut followed a year later with a cruelly gradual approach whereby only the children of slaves would be free upon reaching their majority.²⁸ Thus, there were slaves alive in those states well into the early decades of the 19th century. The last slave recorded alive in Rhode Island was in 1859.²⁹ More recently, Brown University has created a commission to investigate the actions of the slave-trading Brown family the namesake and early benefactors of the institution in order to better understand its own history and consider what remedial actions, if any, the university might take.³⁰

New England also has a prominent place in the history of the women's suffrage movement in the United States. Lydia Chapin Taft was the first women voter in Colonial America, casting votes in three New England town meetings, starting in 1756.³¹ In Worcester, Massachusetts, Lucy Stone organized the National Women's Right's Convention in 1850.³² The focus of which was to give visibility and voice to issues of women's rights and equality.

²⁶ Perry Miller's "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity" in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge MASS: Harvard UP, 1956):pg. 48-98.

²⁷ Miller, pg. 48-98.

²⁸ Jay Coughtry. *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807*. (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1981), pp.214-215.

²⁹ Coughtry. p.215

³⁰ *Slavery, the Brown Family of Providence and Brown University*. A Special Report by The Brown University News Service, http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/Info/Slavery.html. Retrieved July 30, 2009.

³¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan Brownell Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Ida Husted Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage* (Harvard University Press, 1822), p. 134.

³² Ibid.

One of the biggest supporters and friends of this movement was Frederick Douglass a former slave and abolitionist.³³

But it is not just the historical culture of New England that has prompted this idea of racial and gender inclusivity. The idea of S.N.E. as a denominational model of promoting diversity has been invoked by intentional attitudes and actions of the leadership.

Is there a Distinctive Southern New England Model?

Maybe the focus should not be placed on the motives for promoting these claims about the S.N.E. model, but rather on the claims themselves. Does it make sense to think of S.N.E. as a denominational model for accommodating diversity? If we unpack this idea, it rests on three central assumptions:

- (i) that there is a distinctly S.N.E. model of managing diversity;
- (ii) that this model is working well in S.N.E.; and
- (iii) that other structure (i.e. denominations, governments, businesses) can learn from the S.N.E. experience.

1.7 INTRODUCTORY CONCLUSION AND QUESTIONS OF IMPORTANCE FOR THE STUDY

The leadership hierarchy in both Florida-Tampa and Florida-Cocoa is drastically different from that of S.N.E. and both lack the multicultural variety of their northern counterpart. Florida Tampa's leadership consists of seven white men. Florida Cocoa's leadership consists of five black men. It appears that Florida as a whole is still demarcated along racial lines even well into the twenty-first century of this post-modern world. The

³³ Canton, *History of Women Suffrage*, p. 134.

issues and wounds of the past are still as fresh as yesterday, leaving some to wonder if things will ever change.

What drives this study is not the question, will things ever change? But rather, the more potent questions such as, do things need to change? And if so why? Furthermore, *how* can things change and in what ways? What is the first step to change? With more than 40 years since the Jim Crow era, why have things not changed? Moreover, what issues are keeping change from occurring? Finally, is it in the best interest of everyone that change takes place?

In summary, segregation in any forms, whether voluntary or externally- imposed, only results in negative effects. This is because with segregation comes varying degrees of inequality. Such inequality creates an imbalance of many kinds. This is the case in the Church of God in general and in Florida in particular. As a result of segregation, Florida-Cocoa is left mostly to its own workings and its ministers rarely see promotion to higher levels. As the title indicates, this is the issue of segregation—the inequality and imbalance that results from it. Therefore, separateness is a problem that desperately must be addressed with the intent of finding a concrete and lasting solution.

CHAPTER 2 — HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. EDMOND S. BARR, 1909

Edmond S. Barr, a Bahamian from Exuma residing in Durant, Florida, was the first black minister in the Church of God. He opened the doors for black leadership in the Church of God on the state, national, and international levels, even in the days of extreme racial tension experienced in the American South. However, his leadership would only be relegated to the “colour work,” as it was called at the time.

In 1909, Barr along with his wife Rebecca attended the now-prominent Pleasant Grove camp meeting, at which then General Overseer Ambrose Jessup Tomlinson preached the Pentecostal message to the meeting.³⁴ It must be noted that the Pentecostal message was first introduced to Pleasant Grove two years prior (1907) by F.M. Britton, of North Carolina.³⁵ Upon receiving the Holy Ghost Baptism under the ministry of G.B. Cashwell, Britton decided to take his newfound experience to new fields. Those ripe fields would be in the same home town of the then non-believer Edmond Barr. Stanley H. Frodsham, an early chronicler of the Pentecostal movement, writes in *With Signs Following*:

He [Britton] held a meeting in the Pleasant Grove Campground, Durant, Florida, during June and July, 1907, during which many were saved, reclaimed, and received, and about seventy were filled with the Holy Ghost, speaking in other tongues as the Holy Ghost gave them utterance. Among those filled with the

³⁴ Hunter, Harold D. “A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation: Race Mixing in the Church of God of Prophecy.” *The Azusa Street Rival and Its Legacy*, ed. Harold D. Hunter & Cecil M. Roebuck Jr. Cleveland TN: Pathway Press, pg. 283-284.

³⁵ Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, p. 97.

Spirit were many ministers and Christian workers who went everywhere scattering the fire.³⁶

Conn notes that in that same meeting with Britton, among those who received the Holy Ghost baptism was Sylvia Tharp Meares, a sister of Church of God leader Zeno C. Tharp, and Mrs E.E. Simmons, whose husband would become a prominent Church of God minister.³⁷

It is very likely that in such a small town as Durant, Barr heard of the Camp meeting at Pleasant Grove and all the new experiences of the Spirit. Perhaps it was curiosity that brought him to attend in 1909 with wife Rebecca and friend R.M. Evans, who would become the first Church of God missionary.³⁸

Nevertheless, at this point the Church of God was not in existence in Florida and Pentecostalism was fairly new. The precursor to Pentecostalism in Florida was the Holiness Annex of the Methodist Church. The Holiness Annex was responsible for the Pleasant Grove Campground, which had been built by the South Florida Holiness Association.³⁹ This association operated and organized the annual meetings at Pleasant Grove Campground. Another holiness group operating in Florida at the time was the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church.⁴⁰ Britton, along with J.H. King, as early General Overseer of the Fire Baptized Holiness Church, established a church in the Pleasant Grove area.⁴¹

In his article (The Pentecostal Holiness Church), Vinson Synan writes:

³⁶ Stanley H. Frodsham, *With Signs Following*, revised edition (Springfield, MO., Gospel Publishing House, 1941), p. 42.

³⁷ Conn's *Like A Mighty Army* footnote #4, pg. 97.

³⁸ Conn mentions that R.M. Evans attended the Pleasant Grove sometime in 1908. Both Conn and Hunter indicate that Barr visited Pleasant Grove for the first time in 1909. Other sources note that when Barr visited Pleasant Grove, Evans was with him. It is likely that Evans being a retired Methodist minister invited Barr and his wife Rebecca both Methodist ministers as well in the same area of Florida.

³⁹ Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, p. 97.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

By the end of 1908, much of the Southern Holiness movement had entered the Pentecostal fold. In the following months, a feeling emerged that those of 'like precious faith' should unite to promote the Pentecost message more effectively. This led to a merger of the Pentecostal Holiness Church with the Fire-Baptized Holiness Church in 1911 in the camp meeting village of Falcon, North Carolina.⁴²

In Synan's work, the Fire Baptized Holiness Church has a good case for being the first Pentecostal organization in Florida. It would not be until the following year, on May 17 of 1909, that in response to the fervent preaching of Tomlinson; approximately 20 persons would respond to the message and join together as the first Church of God in Florida. It is not clear whether Barr was a part of that group.⁴³

After Barr and his wife received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, Tomlinson granted both evangelist licenses on May 31, 1909, thus making them the earliest black credentialed ministers and Rebecca the earliest black female credentialed minister.⁴⁴ Immediately following there would be others who would join the Barr's as black ministers in the church. The January, 1913 minutes, which serves as the first official register of ministers, mentions 11 black ministers without reference to race.⁴⁵ Noteworthy, Conn mentions the fact that for a number of years prior to 1920, there was no public or official note on race or colour—which makes it difficult to distinguish names and dates of blacks who became ministers.⁴⁶ Barr became ordained on June 3, 1912. At this time Barr was among three of the highest ranking

⁴² Vinson Synan, "The Pentecostal Holiness Church", <http://pctii.org/arc/synan.html>, accessed April 18, 2009.

⁴³ While Barr visited Pleasant Grove in 1909, no sources including Tomlinson's personal diary indicate whether Barr was part of the group who responded to Tomlinson's preaching on May 17, 1909 to form the first Church of God in Florida.

⁴⁴ Hunter, *A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation*, p. 284.

⁴⁵ Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, pp. 132-133.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

black ministers in the Church of God who was either a Bishop or ordained minister—Barr, Samuel Rice, and D.O. Wall.⁴⁷

2.2. THE BEGINNING OF RACIAL SEPARATION

The black work began almost simultaneously with the white work in Florida with Barr at the forefront. The black work in Florida was the first ground broken for the Church of God in the black community. Many of the earliest members and ministers of the black work in Florida consisted of Bahamians, as well as African Americans living and working in the state.

Barr, along with R.M. Evans, was part of the first missionary venture of the Church of God outside the United States.⁴⁸ In 1909-1910, they went to Barr's native home, the Bahamas, preaching salvation and the Pentecostal message.⁴⁹ The first Church meetings of the missionary quest were held in the area of Augusta and Meadow Streets in Nassau, New Providence. A.J. Tomlinson arrived in the Bahamas and joined the group in 1911. He visited Exuma, Long Island and Ragged Island. The first Church of God in the Bahamas was established in 1911 with three members in a house owned by John Alfred on the south side of Dowdeswell Street in Nassau.

There was much work for Barr to do back in Florida. By 1912, there were three black congregations in Florida. These were in Jacksonville, Miami, and Coconut Grove; a suburban area of Miami.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, pp. 132-133

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 132.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 133.

However, Overseer Tomlinson had questions about ordaining Barr as the first black minister and segregating the young black work. Hunter gives an account of Tomlinson's record on the matter:

Tomlinson wrote in his diary on June 4, 1912: 'Held a conference meeting yesterday to consider the question of ordaining Edmond Barr (colour) and setting the colour people off to work among themselves on account of the race prejudice in the South.'⁵¹

This is the first mention of segregation between the black and white work of the Church of God in general and of Florida in particular. The problem of race seemed to coexist with the birth of the Church of God in Florida. There may be a number of reasons for this, but one definitive reason is that the birth and growth of American Pentecostalism coincided with the intensely difficult racial climate of American culture, especially in the American South. Therefore, when blacks and whites entered Pentecostalism they brought with them social attitudes of the day.

Barr, who became an ordained Bishop in 1914, was appointed as Overseer of the black work in Florida. This appointment by the 1915 General Assembly was the first act of separation by race in the Church of God.⁵² There are two types of separation that have historically taken place in both Church and society—voluntary and involuntary. Examples of voluntary separation include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which in 1816, was born in protest to racism and oppression of black people.⁵³ This break occurred over sociological differences rather than theological ones. A second example would be historically black colleges that developed around the 1850s, the first being Lincoln University

⁵¹ Hunter, *A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation*, p. 285.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ James H. Cone, "God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, Man Our Brother: A Theological Interpretation of the AME Church." *AME Church Review*, Volume CVI, No. 341 (1991), page 25.

(Pennsylvania), whose purpose it was to serve and educate black Americans. These educational institutions resulted from the exclusion of black students from predominately white higher educational systems.

Most of voluntary separation on the part of various sectors of the black communities, whether educational, corporate, or ecclesiastical, appears to have been a direct response to the social climate of the day, which excluded blacks from participation in most realms of American life. Therefore, blacks developed their own communities and living spaces for the progress and maintenance of their own community. The church would be no different. Involuntary separation on the part of American society historically has often been affirmed by laws created to justify and uphold such public injustice. Examples of involuntary separation include segregation of public school systems and other public entities such as restaurants, theatres, buses, etc.

Such was the psychology of inferiority that when blacks entered churches, they were directed to a separate section of the church. Furthermore, participation in the liturgy was always either limited or non-existent.

At this point of Church of God history, the 1915 appointment of Barr by then Overseer Tomlinson seems to have created a very involuntary form of segregation. According to Hunter, Tomlinson held a conference meeting to consider the question of ordaining Edmond Barr and setting the coloured people off to work among themselves on account of the race prejudice in the south.

Two things are of interest in the account taken from Tomlinson's diary.⁵⁴ First, while considering the question of ordaining Barr, Tomlinson seems to have in his mind an appointment of a leader for the black work before separation occurred. In other words, it seems there was already consideration for the black work being separate on the grounds of

⁵⁴ Hunter, *A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation*, p. 285 (As recorded in Tomlinson's personal diary, "A.J. Tomlinson, diary, vol. 2, June 4, 1912, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.").

the racial climate in Florida. Moreover, before Barr was even an ordained minister, he was the most likely candidate for the assignment. The second item of interest is that this separation was initiated by Tomlinson amidst the conference meeting held on the matter. Nothing in the statement taken from Tomlinson's diary suggests that the blacks in Florida either asked or wanted to be separate.

It may have been inevitable for such racial separation to take place due to the sociology and psychology of the time. However, there is no evidence to suggest anyone involved in the black work of 1915 approached the leadership about being separate, as they did at the 1926 General Assembly.⁵⁵ Based on this evidence, it seems clear that the first form of separation along racial lines within the Church of God was involuntary, and was imposed by the church's leadership.

Therefore, it may be seen early in the Church of God's history, as early as 1915, about 19 years after the initial formation of the Christian Union, which would later be changed to the Church of God in 1907, racial separation was already playing a role in the Church's practice and polity.

After only two years in office, Barr was removed as Overseer of the colour work in Florida. The work then continued under Sam C. Perry, a white minister overseeing all of the Churches of God in Florida at the time.⁵⁶ Not much written information exists to adequately explain the removal of Barr from his position. Hunter sheds more light on the situation by noting, "Ministerial records at the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) headquarters dispel the notion that racial prejudice removed Barr from office."⁵⁷ This is because those same records, kept private until now, reveal that Barr was removed from the post of Overseer for sexual

⁵⁵ Conn makes a reference to a group of black ministers approaching the General Assembly asking for their own assembly; see *Like A Mighty Army* pp. 199-200.

⁵⁶ Peter C. Hickson, *History of the Church of God Colour Work*, (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Black Ministries, 1968).

⁵⁷ Hunter, *A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation*, p. 285.

infidelity. After two years in office, moral charges were brought against Barr which led to his subsequent dismissal.

The question still remains whether due process and appropriate action was taken against Barr to establish guilt or innocence. Furthermore, questions of restoration and forgiveness remain open in the event that Barr was guilty of sexual immorality. It seems unlikely that a process of restoration took place owing to the fact that Barr, a once prominent figure in Florida and the Church of God as a whole, suddenly vanishes from the scene upon his removal from office. There is no recorded mention of Barr's activity with the Church of God after 1915. Therefore, it seems that Barr's removal was not an issue of race but rather of morality.

As mentioned earlier, Tomlinson had Barr in mind for the Overseer post before Barr was even ordained as a minister. This is significant for a number of reasons. First, Barr was the only likely candidate for the position over the black work. This is further demonstrated by the sequence of events after Barr was removed. He was not replaced by another black minister, but instead the black work was put under the leadership of Sam Perry, a white minister, in 1916. It was only a few years later, in 1919, that C.F Bright, a black minister from Pennsylvania, was placed as Overseer of Pennsylvania in 1919, and subsequently as Overseer in New Jersey in 1920.⁵⁸

Because the black work in the Church of God grew, T. J. Richardson, a favoured man of Tomlinson, was appointed as the first National Overseer of the Black work in the Church of God in 1922.⁵⁹ He held this position for one year, but he left the Church. There was an infamous split involving Tomlinson. This split resulted in Tomlinson being ousted as General Overseer of the COG. Subsequently, Tomlinson left the COG and established a new Church

⁵⁸ Hunter, *A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation*, p.285.

⁵⁹ Hunter, p. 287.

eventually called the Church of God of Prophecy.⁶⁰ Following the departure of Tomlinson and Richardson as well as many others, David La Fleur was appointed overseer of the black work.⁶¹ La Fleur had been a credentialed minister in COG since 1913 and started his ministry in Miami.⁶²

Florida would play a prominent role in the black work and affairs of the Church of God in the United States. This is due to several factors: 1. the black work of the Church of God began in Florida. 2. The black congregations were all in Florida for several years. 3. From its inception in 1922, The Office of the National Overseer of the black work was located in Florida, with all of the early Overseers coming from Florida. The only exception was W.L. Ford, from Evergreen, Alabama who moved to Jacksonville upon his appointment.⁶³

In 1938, E.L. Simmons produced *The History of the Church of God*.⁶⁴ In this early historical work on the Church of God Simmons points out that the duty of the National Overseer of the Coloured Work was to appoint State Overseers in states where there was a strong presence of African American members—the state of Florida would receive the bulk of the Overseer’s attention for two reasons: First, the Office of the National Overseer of the black work was located in Florida; second, the majority of the overall black membership of the Church of God was in Florida.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Hunter, *A Journey Toward Racial Reconciliation*, p. 288.

⁶¹ Hickson, *History of the Church of God Colour Work*.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Please see Hickson’s “*History of the Church of God Colour Work*,” which chronicles the Black National Overseers of the Black National work.

⁶⁴ E.L. Simmons, *History of the Church of God* (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1938).

⁶⁵ Simmons, *History of the Church of God*, pp. 85-88.

2.3. AN ATTEMPT AT RACIAL INTEGRATION

Perhaps the biggest moment of reckoning for the Church of God is in relation to the separation of the black and white church in 1966. 1966 marked 40 years since the General Assembly officially divided the church into two groups - one black and one white. However, as previously discussed, this study shows the divide occurred much earlier with the appointment of Barr as the first state overseer of the black churches in Florida. The difference is that the 1915 appointment of Barr reveals the division on a state level, whereas, the 1926 development of the National Black Assembly brought the separation to a national level. The consciousness of human rights had been sparked in 1964 when the Church adopted a measure—the “Resolution on Human Rights,” which recognized the dignity and worth of every individual.⁶⁶

Furthermore, as Conn states:

The resolution asserted “that no American should, because of his race or religion, be deprived of his right to worship, vote, rest, eat, sleep, be educated, live and work on the same basis as other citizens.”⁶⁷

The rhetoric of the measure was noble, but there was no concrete evidence of effect until two years later with the disavowal of the Black National Assembly in an effort to erase the line of separation between black and white. The climate of the civil rights era, beginning about 1955, set the stage for conscientious change on the part of a Holiness Pentecostal church, which was still deeply rooted and anchored in the American South. With

⁶⁶ Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, pp. 352-353.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

the majority of its membership in the states of Georgia, Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, and North Carolina, and general headquarters in Cleveland, TN, the Church of God knew all too well the social injustices and deprivation that plagued its black constituency.

With the advent of the civil rights movements and in an atmosphere of societal reform, institutions from schools to churches could not help but be influenced by the fight for equality by black Americans, most of which was coming from the churches. The civil rights movement provided the necessary boldness for blacks in organizations like the Church of God to speak out against the degradation they experienced. It cannot be understated nor ignored that the Church of God is a product of its southern heritage, with its inception taking place in the mountains of Cherokee County, North Carolina.

One must wonder what would have happened if the national civil rights movement had not provoked thought and action against segregation and inequality. Would the Church of God still have instituted a civil rights measure or not? It is of keen interest that the Church inaugurated the measure in 1964 at the zenith of the civil rights era, coinciding with the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 created by John F. Kennedy.⁶⁸ The church could not ignore the steps taken by society to correct its wrongs.

Therefore the leadership of the Church of God saw it fitting to move from rhetoric to action at the 1966 Assembly. This action eliminated the separation of ethnic or racial groups in the Church of God. This was further augmented by the banning of all references to race or colour from Church of God records, and as Conn writes “all racial barriers broken down.”⁶⁹ However, this newfound gusto on the issue of separation managed to integrate most of the black churches back into the general body. The notable exceptions were the black churches in

⁶⁸ Hugh Graham. *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy, 1960-1972*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).p.

⁶⁹ Conn, *Like A Mighty Army*, pp. 352-353.

Florida, which constituted the overwhelming majority of the smaller constituency in the overall denomination.

The human rights measure was a noble endeavour, but it fell short of truly addressing the problem of separation. The measure only dissolved the Black National Assembly and the position of Black National Overseer. The black churches in Florida remained separated and under the leadership of their own overseer. Moreover, the black churches in Florida consist of most of the black constituency in the Church of God. Therefore, a failure to resolve the issue of separation in Florida is a failure to truly resolve the issue of separation in the Church of God.

2.4. SEPARATION REMAINS

Florida has and always will be at the heart of the racial struggle in the American Church of God. From its beginning, it has been the trailblazer and beacon of black leadership within the Church of God. This has been the case ever since the appointment of Edmond Barr. Every major black leader on the general level in the Church of God has either come from Florida or has moved to Florida at some point in their ministerial career. Therefore, any measure to deal with racial separation must directly engage the black church in Florida, as the Florida church stands as the last iron curtain of segregation in the church. After 1966, nothing else was done to improve the racial trajectory in the church. Blacks continued to sit in the balcony sections at General Assemblies and whites continued to maintain power to control the church, with little or no participation from blacks in the leadership structures.

From this point forward, the office of the National Black Overseer and the National Black assembly ceased to function due to the efforts of the church to re-integrate the black

churches back into the community of faith. However, this re-integration paradigm left the black churches in Florida under their own leadership out of the process. This brings this study to the driving question: Why did Florida-Cocoa not re-integrate with the rest of the church following the abolition of separation in the church by the human rights measure of 1964? The study aims to investigate this question. This is because this issue is still a pressing reality for the current Church of God denomination. The Church of God is still experiencing the effects of over 80 years of separation between the white and black churches of its community. In order for this study to investigate this question, it will need to examine the issue and concerns of integration in the following chapters. After this, the study will proceed to look at the work of R. David Muir on the racial ecclesiology of the Church of God as presented in his doctoral thesis: *Black theology, Pentecostalism, and racial struggles in the Church of God*.⁷⁰ Finally, the study will conclude with the interrogation of the idea of integration and its dangers, if any.

2.5. SUMMARY

In summary this chapter has not only provided an historical account of the history of the black Church of God in Florida, but has also provided a historical perspective on the issue of separation that continues to exist between Florida-Cocoa and Florida-Tampa administrative offices. Barr, along with his wife, were the first blacks mentioned as joining the church, and they became instrumental to the early development and leadership of the black work. It is difficult to locate the precise date the black work began. However, locating Barr's entrance to the church at 1909, and by noting that by 1912 there were three black congregations operating in Jacksonville, Miami, and Coconut Grove, we can safely say the black work was established from 1909 to 1912 without risk of inaccuracy.

⁷⁰ Muir, R David. *Black theology, Pentecostalism, and Racial Struggles in the Church of God*. Ph.D. London: Univ. of London, King's College, 2003.

Barr had several distinctions, including being the first black credentialed minister, first black ordained minister, first black ordained bishop, and first black state overseer. Barr was appointed by Tomlinson as the overseer of the “colour work” in Florida immediately after his ordination. This gives insight that a separate work for blacks was under consideration some time before Barr accepted the position of overseer. The narrative shows that the church has been separated longer than it has been integrated, and separation entered the church at its beginning due to the social paradigms in the surrounding society.

By taking the gospel message back to his native land of the Bahamas, which became the first mission grounds for the Church of God, Barr also became the first black missionary/evangelist. Later, in 1915 Barr was appointed as State overseer of the black work and in Florida. This marks a crucial point for the black work in Florida, since up until this day they maintained their own overseer and control of their own church affairs. Then, in 1964 the church adopted a human rights measure recognizing the human dignity and need for equality for all its members, regardless of race. However, it would take two more years for the church to act upon the rhetoric of the measure by dissolving the separate assembly of the National Black Assembly, as well as removing all racial references from official church documents and records. This measure, while important for the conscience of the church, did nothing to address the issue of separation in Florida, which still functions as the heart of the racial separation.

Chapter 3—A RACIAL SPLIT

3.1. INTRODUCTION

While there has been in times past talk about “Race and Race relations” in the Church of God and the development of separation between racial groups, namely, blacks and whites, nothing has been said about an ecclesiastical and social split behind the “middle wall of partition” as named by A.J. Tomlinson in a previous a previous address to the general assembly, and further brought to light in the works of R.G. Robins *A.J. Tomlinson: Plainfolk Modernist* and Harold D. Hunter ‘s *A Journey toward Racial Reconciliation*.⁷¹ Yet the split, a result of the ideological and social “middle wall of partition” seems to be radical, defying the prevailing thought that even in the climate of heightened racial indifference, blacks remained loyal to the Church of God.

H. Paul Thompson in his article “On Account of Conditions that Seem Unalterable: A Proposal about Race Relations in the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) 1909-1929” poses pertinent questions about this very matter; Thompson asks, "If segregation and discrimination were both so intrinsic to and explicit in the southern religio-cultural ethos, and if every other Pentecostal group completely divided, why not the Church of God too?"⁷² Thompson further asks, "If racism and discrimination were an issue, why did blacks not completely leave the denomination and form their own?"⁷³ The framing of such questions not only yield but demonstrate the view that the Church of God managed to escape the “unalterable conditions” of social norms that caused other Pentecostal denominations to split along race lines.

⁷¹ Roger G. Robins, "A.J. Tomlinson: "Plainfolk Modernist"," in *Portraits of a Generation*, Ed. James R. Goff Jr. and Grant Wacker (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 2002) p.227. Also see Harold D. Hunter *A Journey toward Racial Reconciliation: Race Mixing in the Church of God of Prophecy (Cleveland, TN) pp. 294-296.*

⁷² H. Paul Thompson, “On Account of Conditions that Seem Unalterable: A Proposal about Race Relations in the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) 1909-1929” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, Volume 25, No. 2, Fall 2003.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

While the Church of God did not experience a large withdrawal of black churches on a national level, the withdrawal of churches in Florida was significant enough that a court battle ensued over property and church buildings and the issue has since been deemed sealed and classified by the General Offices in Cleveland, TN.⁷⁴ The revealing of the split in Florida also respectfully challenges the notions of Mickey Crews as stated by Randall J. Stephens that blacks were given opportunities to serve in leadership positions, opportunities they would not have had within traditional denominations.⁷⁵ Thompson seems to write contrary to this view stating:

The absence of blacks from the Council of Twelve [Elders]...quickly became the most powerful governing body in the Church—and it was all white. This probably sent the message that although they were good enough to pastor black churches, blacks were not good enough to exercise significant authority over whites.⁷⁶

The split in many ways reflects the discontentment among blacks in Florida in being left out of the governing process of the Church, yet, while contributing financial support to the well-being of the organization. This discontentment rests at the heart of the racial split in 1966. Moreover, when the governing body decided to dissolve the offices and department of the “National Colour Work”, tensions rose and the inevitable occurred.

⁷⁴ The court case that resulted from the split in Florida took place at the Circuit Court of the 17th Judicial Circuit in Broward County, Florida; it was the case, Reverend Walter Jackson (State Overseer for the Church of God General Assembly and State of Florida) vs. Reverend John B. Ferguson, Reverend J. Z. Smith and Church of God Colour Work, Inc., 1968.

⁷⁵ Randall J. Stephens', *Assessing the Roots of Pentecostalism: A Historiographic Essay*.
<http://are.as.wvu.edu/pentroot.htm>, retrieved August 14, 2009.

⁷⁶ Thompson, *On Account of Conditions that Seem Unalterable*.

3.2. DISSOLVING OF NATIONAL COLOUR WORK

In the year of 1966, The Church of God International Headquarters, Cleveland Tennessee ruled in the Bi-annual General Assembly that they wanted to integrate the National Church of God Colour Works and desired all groups white, black, and Latino/a to be governed under the General offices.⁷⁷ Immediately after the ruling, all offices of the colour works were abandoned and the department dissolved, thus, there was no more National Church of God Colour Works. The Annual Assembly of the “Colour Work” was discontinued as well, which may have also added additional ‘fuel to the fire’ for those already angry about the disavowal of the Colour Work.

According to Bishop Otis Williams & Bishop James Gooden, The National Church of God Colour Works consisted of every black church in the United States, abroad (New Testament Church of God England) & the Caribbean Islands.⁷⁸ Many of these black leaders came together every year for what they called a ‘National Convention’ which was held annually in Jacksonville, Florida, located on Steel & Blue Street on the north side the city. Interestingly, the black churches reported directly to the Colour Works, not to the General Headquarters. This may have kept many of the blacks in the Church of God although they were unhappy with the social ethos of the organization. The fact that their funds were going directly to the Black work and not the general offices may have provided some relief in an already racially tense denomination. However, when this ceased to be the case, blacks felt slighted that they lacked support and representation at the highest levels of leadership, although their finances now went to support the very ones who retained most of the power.

⁷⁷ Church of God General Assembly Minutes, 1966.

⁷⁸ Special thanks is due to Bishop Otis Williams and Bishop James Gooden who allow me to interview them by phone about the history of the split of the National Church of God and the Church of God (Cleveland, TN). Special thanks is also owed to Veronica Cooper the first secretary of the newly organized National Church of God. She was instrumental in providing key information and documents including a copy of the Charter book of the organization.

General Headquarters did not want the separate blacks to have their own General Overseer, while whites had their own separate General Overseer. In contrast, Church leaders, sought to change the structure of the denomination so that the entire Church of God organization have one General overseer and each state have a representative/State Overseer, (which was later named State administrative Bishop) whom all reported directly to the headquarters in Cleveland.

The Colour people saw this as a major problem and did not want the change to occur due to a general feeling that the action was not full integration, but just a partial integration. Whereas, overwhelming feelings arose, that white Bishops wanted to rule over the black pastors, but did not want the black pastors ruling over them. Therefore black members protested, desiring to remain separate.

In 1966 the majority ruled in the General assembly for the change to occur and the decision resulted in the blacks' favour. At the time of this decision in 1966 a white overseer by the name of David Lemons was the Overseer of the Colour Works. Black officials who served under Lemon's administration are as named: Bishop Hartman (Harry) Poitier who was the Secretary/Treasurer, Bishop Horace Hall-one of the black council of the twelve & Bishop Winn, however, after the 1966 decision, these positions were cancelled immediately and the office of National Church of God Colour Works was dissolved.

Immediately following, General Headquarters appointed Bishop Walter Jackson as the first State Overseer over Florida. The building in Jacksonville was considered the Florida State Office. Bishop Walter Jackson, a black ordained Bishop, held this position for 5 years. The time in office was four years but since he was not elected but appointed by General Headquarters, the first year was not considered part of the standard four year tenure.

In 1966 after Bishop Walter Jackson was appointed as the first State Overseer of the once again separated Florida, many of the black churches across the United States and other

countries began to withdraw from the Church of God, each going in their own direction, though some may contend these withdrawals were sparse leaving little effect on the denomination as a whole. Meanwhile, a group of pastors in Florida came together & decided to form their own organization as a result. Incidentally, many of the pastors in Florida were in agreement to leave the Church of God until they found out they could not take the church buildings with them.⁷⁹ Any building which was deeded to Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee had to remain with the parent denomination, thus retrieving all of the Church of God buildings that were taken by pastors.

Walter Jackson encountered a major challenge with this issue as the first appointed State Overseer. As overseer he was responsible for retrieving all of the Churches of God properties that was taken with pastors who left the organization, one of the major properties in question was 5th Avenue Church of God, 211 N.W. 5th Avenue, Ft. Lauderdale FL, which was at the centre of the court battle between the Church of God and the National Church of God.⁸⁰ The National Church of God is a Pentecostal organization of about twenty churches that came out of Church of God in the mid 1960's due to feelings of racial inequality. The National Church of God is the most notable defection of black churches and pastors in the history of the Church of God during a time of heightened racial unrest socially in the American Civil Rights era. This group would courageously break apart and stay apart from the Church of God even until this day.

⁷⁹ The Church of God has a history in dealing with defected ministers who attempt to take church property with them that is deemed Church of God, the most famous case of this is A.J. Tomlinson who battled the Church of God proceeding his impeachment on the name "Church of God," the result was a long court battle in Hamilton County Judicial Court that resulted in the court ruling in the favour of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) retaining its name.

⁸⁰ This is evidenced in the court case; the Reverend Walter Jackson (State Overseer for the Church of God General Assembly and State of Florida) vs. Reverend John B. Ferguson, Reverend J. Z. Smith and Church of God Colour Work, Inc.

3.3. THE FORMING OF THE NATIONAL CHURCH OF GOD, INC

After the split in 1966 a small group of pastors came together to form the National Church of God. Inc., distinguished from the National Church of God Colour Works. The small group of pastor's included Rev. H. L. Cartwright, Rev. Leonard Josey Sr., Rev. J. H. Woodside and Rev. J. B. Ferguson.⁸¹

When the separation of the Church of God occurred some of the pastors who could not take their church with them stayed or returned to the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee). One of the pastors who originally stayed was Rev. J. B. Ferguson who pastored the Church of God in West Palm Beach, Florida. While, Rev. H. L. Cartwright and the other pastor held several meetings for the purposes of organizing the National Church of God, Inc. Meanwhile at the 5th avenue Church of God, the current pastor was Bishop Causeway who was not in agreement with the split and wanted to stay with the Church of God (Cleveland, TN). However, the majority of the members of the local congregation wanted to leave the denomination-- therefore the local church Trustee fired pastor Causeway and in his stead voted for Bishop J.B Ferguson to come and be their pastor at the 5th Avenue Church of God.

As Bishop Ferguson became the pastor of 5th Avenue Church of God in 1966, he then joined with the other pastors who were forming the newly National Church of God, Inc., with their headquarters in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Because Ferguson had the bigger building at the time they named the 5th Avenue Church of God the National Church of God, Inc. in which they had their first National Convention in 1967. Thereafter several more conventions were held while the court battle over the church building continued.

⁸¹ National Church of God Charter book (1968), p.3.

Even though the National Church of God, Inc. was functioning in the 5th Avenue Building, Rev Walter Jackson came down and held his first meeting with the ministers regarding the return of the building to the Church of God. The court battle actually began in 1966 and was in legal proceedings for about 3-5 years before the courts ruled that the building was to be returned to the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) immediately.⁸²

3.4 CONFLICT ABOUT THE RULING IN FAVOR OF CHURCH OF GOD, (CLEVELAND TN)

According to Bishop Otis Williams, the courts ruled in favour of the Church of God because the deeds to the church were not clear as to who actually owned the building. According to Veronica Cooper who was the first secretary for the National Church of God, Inc. she was subpoenaed by Rev. Walter Jackson to appear in court to testify. Cooper, further states “the National Church of God would have won the battle if it had not been for the fact that they searched the records of the current pastor Bishop J. B. Ferguson and his records only showed that he was a reporting pastor of the Church of God.”

According to Eldra Cartwright, the daughter of the Rev. H.L. Cartwright, she remembered her father saying, “the reason for the ruling and why the church was tied up in court for so long and the conflict was that Bishop J.H. Curry built the 5th Avenue Church of God with no financial help from the Church of God (Cleveland TN), therefore they felt that the Church of God should not have any rights to the church building, but the actual deeds did not reflect this and that is why the National Church of God, Inc. lost the church to General Headquarters.”

⁸² The final ruling of the case resulted in the warranty deeds of the 5th Avenue Church of God being signed over to the Church of God through its representative the State Overseer of Florida, Bishop Walter Jackson.

CHAPTER 4 — CHURCH OF GOD ECCLESIOLOGY AND POLITY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The transformation of Pentecostalism from a formative, sprawling, developing entity of the twentieth century to a global movement of Christian modernity represents a new, significant, influential force in the global market of religion. Allan Anderson, Pentecostal historian and theologian states of North American Pentecostalism that it is "...arguably the most significant global expansion of a Christian movement in the history of Christianity."⁸³ Pentecostalism has become so significant that Margaret Poloma points out that the subtitle of Harvey Cox's book *Fire from Heaven* suggests Pentecostalism is "reshaping the religion of the twenty-first century."⁸⁴ Pentecostalism is a global culture with subcultures localized in various contexts of the world; in what some scholars such as Anderson call 'Pentecostalisms.' If Pentecostalism is a global entity as many say—should not its theology and ecclesiology reflect this nature?

Moreover, Anderson addresses the bias of Pentecostalism in his representation of Pentecostal history as an interpretation from a predominantly white male perspective.⁸⁵ He says that this sort of reflection or retelling of history "neglects the vital and often more significant work of Asian, African, African American, Caribbean and Latino/a Pentecostal pioneers."⁸⁶ In my view, Anderson more importantly points out Grant Wacker's assertion of white bias, in what Wacker terms 'ritualisation of Pentecostal history', which Anderson says

⁸³ Allan Anderson, *the Origins of Pentecostalism and its Global Spread in the Early Twentieth Century*. Lecture for the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 5 October 2004.

⁸⁴ Margaret M. Poloma, "The Spirit Bade Me Go: Pentecostalism and Global Religion." Paper prepared for presentation at the Association for the Sociology of Religion Annual Meetings, August 11-13, 2000. Washington, D.C.

⁸⁵ Anderson, *the Origins of Pentecostalism*, 2004.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

includes a 'white racial bias' that ignored the central influence of black culture on Pentecostal worship and theology.⁸⁷ The same can be said of American Pentecostalism's ecclesiology in many larger, white classical, North American groups like the Church of God. Not only have Pentecostalism's history and theology been framed through the lens of white male dominated voices, but many ecclesiologies lend themselves to institutional structural prejudice. Leonard Lovett calls this behaviour *institutional racism*; to which he surmises is an extension of individual racism.⁸⁸ Iain MacRobert would agree with Lovett, but plainly calls it white racism whether systematic or individual.⁸⁹

The ecclesiological structure and polity of many North American Pentecostal groups favour an American paradigm and ideology over a truly global polity and praxis. Many Pentecostal denominations may have become global in statistics, but have failed to become global in its policies and leadership models.

With regard to the question of separation of black and white in British Christianity, Walter J. Hollenweger says "they are two cultures, an oral, narrative, inclusive black culture and a literary, conceptual, exclusive white culture. The two integrate very badly and only some of the black and white Christians became 'bilingual.'"⁹⁰ This can similarly be said of white and black Christians in North America or even around the world. While I agree concretely with Hollenweger, I also submit that what separates us culturally should never separate us spiritually or cause one to assume a position of superiority over another. In America the cultural nuances between northern Christians and southern Christians below the Mason Dixon line are different; yet, white southerners or northerners do not systematically

⁸⁷ Taken from Anderson's, *The Origins of Pentecostalism*. Also see Grant Wacker, 'Are the Golden Oldies Still worth Playing? Reflections on History Writing Among Early Pentecostals', *Pneuma* 8:2 (1986), p95 (footnoted in Anderson's paper).

⁸⁸ Leonard Lovett. *The Present: The Problem of Racism in the Contemporary Pentecostal Movement*. Cyber Journal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research. http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/lovett1.html#_edn5. Retrieved 15 August, 2009.

⁸⁹ Please see Iain MacRobert's book *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*. London: Macmillan Press, 1988.

⁹⁰ Walter J. Hollenweger. Foreword: *Pentecostalism: Promises and Problems. The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), xiii-xiv.

nor individually attempt to categorically separate from each other. The question of north and south culture may be a good paradigm in demonstrating that differences of culture and even language do not provide a legitimate excuse for prejudicial separation.

This chapter will examine from a critical discussion perspective the central issues about the ecclesiology and polity that also may reveal insights into the continued separation of the black church in Florida as greatly detailed throughout the overall thesis.

Institutional structure is the brain of the matter, while ecclesiology is the heart; it is with this view that we embark on a discussion that centres at the brain and heart of racial division and unequal polity.

4.2. RACIAL ORGANISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Muir's work *Black theology, Pentecostalism, and racial struggles in the Church of God*, which engages both critical race theory and black theology, is an examination of the racial struggles that have long beleaguered the Church of God.⁹¹ It also investigates the themes of racial discourse that he sees running through American Pentecostalism. Primarily because the bulk of Muir's contribution is noted in the areas of history and politics, this racial/religious dimension of his work has received very little consideration and is a resource that has been sadly neglected.

Muir says that racialisation of organizational development set the scene for the politics of race and its cultural assumptions becoming the norm in Pentecostal polity and practice. Leonard Lovett takes it a step further and boldly calls this form of behaviour

⁹¹ Muir, *Black theology, Pentecostalism, and racial struggles in the Church of God*, King's College, London, 2003.

“institutional racism.”⁹² Lovett defines institutional racism as *the conscious manipulation of institutions to achieve racist objects. To this end, racist institutions are but extensions of individual racial thought.*⁹³ Now, that may seem a bit harsh to some but these thoughts by Lovett merit consideration. Is it possible that the ecclesiology and institution of some Pentecostal groups are racist?

In the beginning years of the Pentecostal movement, racism was direct and confrontational, i.e. segregation. Segregation was a direct result of racial policies that saw whites as superior to blacks. Is segregation then racist? A simple yes does not entirely cover the spectrum of segregation; some segregation is voluntary as pointed out with the case of the black Church of God in Florida.

However, the point of separation in Florida is due to the institutional structure and polity of the Church of God which its black members felt excluded them from enjoying full equality as members.

A group of black ministers stated at the 1926 General Assembly of the Church of God:

We feel... somewhat embarrassed and handicapped to the extent we cannot make much progress that we really desire, and we are asking you brethren, with the consent of all our brethren present at this Assembly, if there can be a way formulated by which we can arrange better to take care of our affairs among the colour [sic] work.⁹⁴

⁹² Lovett, Leonard. “The Present: The Problem of Racism in the Contemporary Pentecostal Movement.” Cyber journal for Pentecostal-Charismatic Research accessed May 7th, 2009, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj14/lovett1.html>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, p. 199.

What would make them feel this way? The bold move by the black ministers cannot be viewed positively.⁹⁵ What is interesting and worth noting at this point is that the Church of God in Florida was always separated as evidenced throughout this thesis, but now the black ministers in the denomination sought to have their own General Assembly within the framework of the National General Assembly. This meant that black ministers wanted to setup their own means by which to develop and propagate polity and institutional structure.

A look into the function and purpose of the General Assembly will give us more insight into the reasons and advantages of blacks hosting their own assembly. Let me add before beginning that I see such a shift as a challenge to the establishment's ecclesiology and polity.

What is also worth noting is the following comment from MacRobert, "In 1921 the apartheid which already existed in Florida was extended to the whole organization."⁹⁶ The organizing of a separate black assembly now moved the line of racial separation from Florida, to the rest of the Church of God.

4.3. EXAMING POLITY THROUGH THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

We now turn to R. Hollis Gause's work *Church of God Polity*, which is Gause's attempt to place in systematic form the rules of the church order that are contained in the *Supplement to the Minutes of the General Assembly*.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ The Minutes of the Twenty-first Annual Assembly in 1926 mentions that a group of Negro ministers approached the General Assembly with the request of hosting their own assembly. This request was not received well with the initial thought that such a move could possibly lead to a further separation of the black members from the general church. Please see *Minutes of the Twenty-first Annual Assembly*, 1926. pp. 27-29.

⁹⁶ MacRobert, the *Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*, pg. 67.

⁹⁷ R. H. Gause. *Church of God Polity* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press), 1987.

What is the Church of God General Assembly?

The General Assembly is a biennial meeting, occurring every two years with the purpose of governing (voting) and discussing (debating) doctrine, issues, and the general life of the church.

Who would determine the time and place of the Black General Assembly? Most likely, its own created Executive Council. This is important because now a reclaiming (or in view of some a claiming of) power is taking place. The Executive Council's role is to serve as the decision making body of the Church between General Assemblies. Its role consists of two responsibilities as stated by Gause:

1. Carry out the programs approved by the church
2. Have the oversight of the ministry of the church in order to preserve the faith, practices, and polity of the Church of God.⁹⁸

What makes up the General Assembly?

The General Assembly consists of any members over the age of sixteen of the Church of God (including ministers) who wishes to attend and participate in its meetings.⁹⁹

Furthermore, the General Assembly comprised of all members from local congregations who are of sound age and able to place a vote. Gause writes that “the General Assembly exists out of the local congregations and represents that body at which all local congregations meet

⁹⁸ Gause, *Church of God Polity*, p. 132.

⁹⁹ Bylaws of the Church of God, Art. VI. 64th A., 1992, p. 7.

together for the purpose of exercising corporate government in the Church of God.”¹⁰⁰ In effect, the General Assembly is the corporate government of the Church of God.

The General Assembly gives voice to the matters of the church. For many years, blacks attended the General Assemblies they sat in the balcony area of the auditorium as passive spectators rather than active participants. Thus, having their own assembly moved blacks from the position of attending spectator to attending participant.

4.4. HIGHEST POINT OF AUTHORITY

The General Assembly is the highest court of authority in decisions pertaining to doctrine, practice, and polity of the Church of God. Moreover, this position of the General Assembly demonstrates the centralization of government in the Church of God. Because the Assembly makes up the voting population of local congregations, the General Assembly is characteristically comprised of white southern males. The Church of God as a Pentecostal denomination is rooted in the American South and most attending members were white southern males which suggests that most decisions were made by a white majority. This point are raised by Thompson in his article “On Account of Conditions that seem Unalterable,”¹⁰¹ Thompson identifies five trends and practices that can be said to imply racism in the Church of God.¹⁰² We will look at the first two. First, the problem of attendance at the annual assemblies;¹⁰³ while the Church of God does not keep an official record of all who attend the General Assemblies both past and present, it is widely known that blacks who attended were

¹⁰⁰ Gause, *Church of God Polity*, p. 91.

¹⁰¹ Paul, Thompson, *On Account of Conditions that seem Unalterable: A Proposal about Race Relations in the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) 1909-1929*, unpublished manuscript, 2003.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 10.

given separate seating in the auditorium's balcony or a separate room. Thompson is correct; there was poor attendance among blacks in early assemblies.

Randall J. Stephens in his paper *Assessing the Roots of Pentecostalism: a Historiography Essay* makes the claim that the early years of the Church of God were marked by cooperation.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, he employs Mickey Crews' similar thoughts by stating the Church of God "like Populism, offered women as well as blacks opportunities to serve in positions of leadership which they would not have had in traditional organizations."¹⁰⁵ Early polity of the Church of God contradicts Stephen's and Crews claims regarding women. In the polity of the General Assembly women were not allowed to vote during the General Assembly until the 1990's. David Roebuck, Church of God historian details the role of women in the Church of God and instances of gender inequality in his article *Women in God's Army*. Roebuck writes "total equality between male and female ministers has never existed in the Church of God, however. In 1908, the General Assembly excluded women from ordination as deaconesses because the Assembly could not find an example of the ordination of female ministers in the New Testament."¹⁰⁶ The Church Bylaws states in Article I, the General Assembly includes all male members and ministers of the Church of God, which constitutes the voting body.¹⁰⁷ The language of the church bylaws excludes women from its polity. Roebuck validates this by writing that in 1910, women's involvement was totally expelled from Church business by excluding them from any business and activities of the church.¹⁰⁸

Secondly, in regard to the question of blacks, the Church of God was more segregated by race than integrated. Numerically, Florida has more black churches than any

¹⁰⁴ Randall J. Stephens, *Assessing the Roots of Pentecostalism: a Historiography Essay*, <http://are.as.wvu.edu/pentroot.htm>, retrieved August 12, 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ David Roebuck, *Women in God's Army*. Church of God History and Heritage, Fall 1997.

¹⁰⁷ Church of God bylaws, art. I. 53rd A., 1970, p.22.

¹⁰⁸ Roebuck, *Women's in God Army*. p. 2.

other state in the denomination and at one point in history more black churches than the other states collectively, this may still be true. So, in view of this the Church may be considered more segregated than integrated. Blacks found racial inclusivity difficult in many early Pentecostal groups including the Church of God and therefore, many found solidarity and acceptance with groups like the Church of God in Christ a predominantly black Pentecostal denomination. Historically, the observations made by Stephens and Crews with respect to blacks and women appear to be invalid. Furthermore, this was the reason that the black ministers approached the 1926 general assembly because they felt “racial cooperation”, as Stephens puts it, was non-existent.

MacRobert acknowledges by writing,

The white dominated Church of God who were so willing to suffer persecution for the sake of doctrine, conformed without any visible resistance to the racism of the South, and even ensured the continued domination of blacks by whites in their organization.¹⁰⁹

The disparity of equality between blacks and whites were so great that it prompted the church to issue a resolution on the issue in 1964 at the 50th General Assembly, the result being the 1964 resolution on human rights. But such racial tension continued to exist and as recent as the year 2000 the Church of God issued another resolution this time on *Racism and Ethnic Disparity* at the 68th General Assembly, stating:

¹⁰⁹ MacRobert, *the Black Roots and White Racism*, p. 67.

WHEREAS the Church of God from its inception has contended to be inclusive of peoples regardless of gender, cultural background or race; and

WHEREAS the 50th General Assembly in 1964 adopted a resolution on human rights affirming the worth of every individual; and

WHEREAS every race bears the image of God and has its origin in Adam who is the Father of all mankind; and

WHEREAS in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slaves nor free men, men nor women, but we are all one in Him; and

WHEREAS the Resolution on Leadership and World Vision in the 1990 General Assembly Minutes commits the church to be “international...transcending culture, race, nationalism, and politics”; and

WHEREAS we are beholden to a Christ like example and lifestyle, one of acceptance, affirmation, and unconditional love;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this International General Assembly recognizes all members of the body of Christ as equal in function and consequence, and every race and ethnic distinction a valuable and necessary field for the winning of souls and the furtherance of the kingdom of God upon this earth; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we commit towards the elimination of racism and bigotry, corporately identifying racism and bigotry as sinful hindrances which prevent us

from truly realizing brotherhood and Christian love within and outside the body of the international church and the many peoples and races which it reaches and encompasses.¹¹⁰

I contend that the General Assembly is a key sticking point in understanding the ecclesiology of the Church and helps us to look more closely at reasons why the black constituency felt it necessary to have their own Assembly. It is through the General Assembly that church governance takes place. One must ask, was this a move by blacks to gain some power and control?

Initially, the General Assembly was a meeting place for the early congregations that formed the Holiness Church (Church of God). Conn relates “there was a yearning for closer fellowship among the four local congregations, but an omnipresent hunger for deeper knowledge of God and the Scriptures made it increasingly desirable to call a meeting of all the churches.”¹¹¹ Likewise, the black church yearned for closer fellowship with its sisters and brothers throughout the denomination and having their own assembly was the best solution. A black Assembly would do four things for the black constituency: 1. Increase cultural solidarity. 2. Foster racial identity. 3. Create black governance. 4. Offer a platform and voice for black concerns.

4.5. CULTURAL SOLIDARITY

Why was it important for the black community of the Church of God to have a space in which to increase cultural solidarity? One reason is that those who look like you and are intertwined in your experiences know first-hand your own pain and suffering. It would make

¹¹⁰ 68th A., 2000, p. 89.

¹¹¹ Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, p. 61.

sense then, for “cultural solidarity” to suggest supportive behavior by members within a cultural group, perhaps the maintenance and support of a shared cultural identity is at stake.

More notably churches were an important source of cultural solidarity among Black people in the southern United States in every facet of American life subsequent to slavery. In the book *African American Religious Thought*, Eddie S. Glaude declared “The black church was in fact the primary vehicle for the exercise of black agency, a place where the humanity of America’s darker “citizens” was acknowledged and basic human aspirations for self-determination were achieved.”¹¹²

Solidarity fosters unity and unity is a key component for any group wanting to challenge the status quo of institutional racism or prejudicial polity. The idiom “there is strength in numbers” has never been truer. Black Nationalist elements always find themselves into any conversation that deals with black solidarity and/or identity.

It can be argued that elements of Black Nationalism helped propel the black community within the Church of God to seek their own. Glaude defines Black nationalism as, in its broadest sense, a sign, an analytic, that describes a range of historically manifested ideas about black American possibilities that include any or all of the following: racial solidarity; cultural specificity; religious, economics and political power and/or separatism- this last has been articulated as a possibility both within and outside of U.S. territorial boundaries.¹¹³ Themes of Black Nationalism, black power, and black pride are not foreign to the black church. The black church formed its own groups and organizations to combat racism both in society and the church; an example of such group is the Southern Christian

¹¹² Cornel West ed. , Eddie S. Glaude Jr, ed. *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), p. 338.

¹¹³ Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Is it nation time?: contemporary essays on black power and Black Nationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 157.

Leadership Conference (SCLC).¹¹⁴ Therefore, black ministers in the Church of God were not acting out of the norm in requesting a separate Assembly to deal with their own affairs.

Thompson in his article on race in the Church of God asks a very important question, “If segregation and discrimination were both so intrinsic to and explicit in the southern religio-cultural ethos, and if every other Pentecostal group completely divided, why not the Church of God too?”¹¹⁵

4.6. FOSTERING RACIAL IDENTITY

Secondly, the black assembly had the ability to foster racial identity among blacks in the Church of God. Perhaps more than any black scholar both past and present, W.E.B. Du Bois captures the essence and struggle of the black identity in his work *The Souls of Black Folk*.¹¹⁶ This magnum opus of Du Bois view on the black identity can be seen as the most famous assessment of the black identity, saying “One feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body.”¹¹⁷

This is not mere lofty language, but a harsh reality of the struggle for many blacks especially during the heightened periods of racial tension in which the early black Church of God members existed. I believe black identity goes further than just the conflict of internal blackness. Black identity ushers out into the life patterns and behaviour of the black community through its food, music, dance, dress, and language.

¹¹⁴ In 1957 Martin Luther King joined with Ralph David Abernathy, Fred Shutterworth, and Bayard Rustin to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Based in Atlanta, Georgia, the main objective of the SCLC was to coordinate and assist local organizations working for the full equality of African Americans.

¹¹⁵ Thompson, *On Account of Conditions that Seem Unalterable*, pp. 240.

¹¹⁶ Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt. *The Soul of Black Folks* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903).

¹¹⁷ Du Bois, *the Soul of black Folks*, chapter I.

I contend that out of our identity, our experiences of struggle and dejection flow. This is why it was important for the black Church of God to request their own assembly, so that a sense of racial identity could be nourished among the bosoms of its own saints. Having a black assembly meant having an assembly with black music, black dancing, black singing, black preaching, and other black nuances otherwise lost and ignored in the mixture of a predominantly white Assembly. In the midst of a black Assembly, black people could unapologetically be black.

4.7. BLACK GOVERNANCE

Thirdly, orchestrating a black Assembly called for black governance. Blacks to some degree could have power over their own affairs, albeit, under the watchful eye and approval of the white majority. This can be seen as a false sense of governance; nevertheless, it would allow blacks to make some decisions about their own well-being. Black leadership through the centuries of American culture has always been central to the activity and attitudes of the black community. From Frederick Douglas to Martin Luther King Jr, black leaders have been instrumental in fighting for the rights of a people, fundamentally fighting for their existence.

I would further state that an ecclesiology or polity that undermines or impedes black leadership has the ability to stagnate the black church community. In examining the role of the black preacher, Anthea Butler, associate professor of religion at the University of Rochester in New York, suggests that out of the historical experience of African Americans, particularly with regards to the issue of slavery, the preacher arose as someone who could join the slave community with God and stand in the gap against the master in a certain sort of

way.¹¹⁸ The black preacher was often seen as a prophetic figure delivering the people from their plight of struggle; the black preacher came to be the modern Moses for the black community.

The notion of power is at the heart of dialogue about ecclesiology and polity viewed as a means to keep power out of the hands of blacks. If you want to keep power out of the hands of blacks, then keep power out of the hands of black preachers. This is the embodiment of white supremacy.

White Supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of colour by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege. A racialised ecclesiology may indeed be viewed as a form of white supremacy when the majority concoction of leaders is white and the voting mass of the assembly is white as well.

4.8. WHITE SUPREMACY

This is a good place to deal with the notion and definition of white supremacy. One cannot discuss a racialised ecclesiology and polity without examining white supremacy and elements that may be found in the ecclesiastical framework.

The renowned historian George Fredrickson defines white supremacy in this sense:

¹¹⁸ Butler, Anthea. "Examining the Role of the Black Preacher." 2009 National Public Radio (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=11828359>), retrieved August 2009.

In its fully developed form, white supremacy means “colour bars,” “racial segregation,” and the restriction of meaningful citizenship rights to a privileged group characterized by its light pigmentation.¹¹⁹

In an ecclesiastical sense, examples of white supremacy can be seen when qualified black’s leaders being passed over in leadership positions or black churches receiving unequal funding to that of white churches. White supremacy can be a system of organized racial prejudice. The most common mistake people make when they talk about racism is to think it is a collection of prejudices and individual acts of discrimination alone. They do not see that it is a system, a web of interlocking, reinforcing institutions: economic, military, legal, educational, religious, and cultural. As a system, racism affects every aspect of life in a country. By not viewing racism as systemic (part of a system), people often personalize or individualize racist acts. For example, they will reduce racist police behaviour to “a few bad apples” that need to be removed, rather than seeing that it exists in police departments all over the country and is basic to the society. This mistake has real consequences: refusing to see police brutality as part of a system, and that the system needs to be changed, means that the brutality will continue.

The need to recognize racism as being systemic is one reason the term White Supremacy has been more useful than the term racism. Many in the fields of black theology and liberation thoughts often view White Supremacy as a collective ideology of racism by the Caucasian race. In my view, the purpose of racism is much clearer when we call it ‘white supremacy,’ as West, Cone, and others do. Some people think of racism as just a matter of prejudice. ‘Supremacy’ defines a power relationship. Furthermore, governance, ecclesiastical and otherwise is always about power.

¹¹⁹ George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: a comparative study in American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 11.

Therefore, having a black assembly helps to create an environment of black governance otherwise lost in the midst of a predominantly white assembly. However, I would like to bring attention to the fact that in spite of having a black assembly power in the church of God; it still resides in the hands of the white leadership who lead at the very top of the ecclesiastical order. Black governance cannot truly take place until black leaders are a part of the decision making process on every level. Thus, having a separate assembly does not mean you have power, or better yet, functioning separately as a state office (such as the case in Florida), also does not mean you have power. It just means you are separated and therefore separated from the ecclesiastical power structure. The key problem with separation is that black governance remains idle under its own flag instead of side by side with a white majority. This point I shall take up later in more detail.

4.9. A PLATFORM TO VOICE CONCERNS

Now, the fourth thing a black assembly would do for the black constituency of the church is offer a platform and voice for black concerns. At this point in 1926, there existed no platform for blacks to voice their opinions and concerns about church business and life in the Church of God. The denomination had the Evangel publications and various writings from Church leaders like Tomlinson's own journal *Samuel Foxes*. The black church had no publication of the sort. The denomination had the General Assembly as a form of conducting church business for the interest of the Church of God while fostering unity among the members scattered around the country whereas the black community has no such program. A black Assembly meant that the interests and concerns of the black community could be propagated in a public forum instead of private discussions localized. Moreover, it brought black concerns to a national level.

The foundational purpose of the General Assembly was to vote and decide on matters that affected the church whether administrative or doctrinal. The black Assembly's purpose would be to advance the plight of black churches and leaders through its own accord.

I cannot emphasize the point more strongly that black pride and nationalism not only grip black circles socially but it has also found its way into the black church. An ecclesiology of separation forced blacks to be self-determining. Therefore, the idea of a black assembly was a welcome change for blacks to finally have a platform of their own. Later, other ministries and departments would be created by the denomination as an effort of advancing the black ministry. David Roebuck, historian of the Church of God and director of the Dixon Pentecostal Resource Centre writes "Recognizing the need for additional leadership among African-American churches, the Church of God appointed Wallace Sibley, Sr., as a South-eastern Regional Evangelism Director in 1978. This ministry has expanded since that time, and in 1992 Joseph E. Jackson was appointed as Director of the Department of Black Ministries."¹²⁰

However, it must be stated that these ministries were not created as a means to foster dialogue about race or to deal with concerns of systematic 'white supremacy'. These departments and ministries were evangelistic in nature and their purpose was to reach ethnic communities with the gospel. Even today the Black Ministries department sees its role among the black community as evangelistic instead of liberational or as advocate in nature. On the Church of God website the black ministries department is located under the section entitled "World Evangelization."¹²¹

The Department of Black Ministries website makes known the following:

¹²⁰ David. G. Roebuck, "Restorationism and a Vision for World Harvest: A Brief History of the Church of God" (Cleveland, TN). Cyber-Journal for Pentecostal Charismatic Research, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj5/roebuck.html>
Retrieved August 27, 2007.

¹²¹ Please see the Black ministries department website at <http://www.blackministries.cc/>.

Its mission is to reach, teach, and release spirit-empowered Ministers and Laity to promote Evangelism Discipleship, Church Growth and ultimately Healthy Churches.

Its beliefs: We believe the role of the black community in the Church of God is vital to reaching people of ethnicity in the United States and around the world.

Holiness is still God's Standard of Living for His People.

Its goals are to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the power of Pentecost to every individual through Evangelism Outreach, Church Planting, Church Amalgamation and Church Revitalization.

To become a self-supporting Department spiritually and financially in order to empower young black ministers for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

To develop brochures and reports outlining accomplishments of the department, and build an archive of black constituents in the Church of God past and present to preserve and carrying on the Church of God Black or African heritage.

To provide training and resources materials to ministers who have the ability to reach others and bring them into the Kingdom.¹²²

The only place on the website where it mentions “Black community” is in its beliefs section and the mention occurs once. This begs the question, what role does the black ministries department play in the advancing of black concerns about a racialised ecclesiology and/or polity? According to its purpose, mission, beliefs, and goals it has no role in the matter.

¹²² Church of God Black Ministries at <http://www.blackministries.cc/>, ‘About’ section, retrieved August 12, 2008.

The creation of a separate black assembly could potentially unnerve the system of prejudice and racism experienced in the Church of God. A black assembly meant a competing force in the ecclesiology of racialisation and an opponent to policies of prejudice. Unfortunately, black leaders did not seize upon that opportunity to use the platform of the Black Assembly as a threat or alternative voice to racial organizational development and ecclesiastical racism.

The Church of God black Assembly was discontinued in 1966 with the passing of the following measure by the General Assembly of the Church of God:

WHEREAS any reference to the separation of ethnic or racial group in the Church of God is incongruent with the resolution on human rights passed at the 1964 General Assembly (1964 General Assembly Minutes, page 67, 68); and Whereas the section captioned “Colour” in the supplement of the 1964 General Assembly Minutes (page 18, 19) does not comply with the spirit of the Resolution:

WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND that the section designated “Colour” in the Minutes of the Fiftieth General Assembly of the Church of God be deleted. We Further Recommend that the general government practice of the Church of God obtain in all circumstances.¹²³

4.10. THE ABSENCE OF RACIAL RECONCILIATION LANGUAGE IN POLITY

¹²³Church of God 1966 General Assembly Minutes.

I would now like to address not what is present in the polity or publications of the Church of God, but more importantly, what is not present. The Church of God policies and literature lacks language that deals with the question of race problems. This may lead observers to assume there have not been any efforts toward concrete racial reconciliation within the denomination. In the entire Church of God polity book the only mention of anything related to *black* is the mention of the *Negro Aged Ministers Pension Program*.¹²⁴ There are no other indications of anything related to *black* throughout the book.

However, in 1964 the Church of God General Assembly did pass a resolution on human rights. Of the resolution Conn records the following:

The stage had been set in 1964 with the adoption of a strong “Resolution on Human Rights” that recognized the dignity and worth of every individual. The resolution asserted “that no American should, because of his race or religion, be deprived of his right to worship, vote, rest, eat, sleep, be educated, live and work on the same basis as other citizens.”¹²⁵

Then in 1966 another measure was adopted that ‘formally’ ended the separation of ethnic and racial groups in the Church of God.¹²⁶ This is not entirely true as the Church of God still remained separate in Florida along the lines of black and white. The measure includes general rhetoric about the dignity of individuals but it does not address specific and direct concerns about race in the Church of God itself. It does not recognize past acts of injustice or racism. It does not offer apologies in relation to a system of white supremacy born out of societal attitudes. And finally, it does not offer a concrete way forward on dealing

¹²⁴ Gause, p. 217.

¹²⁵ Conn, *Like a Mighty Army*, p. 353.

¹²⁶ Minutes of the Fifty-first General Assembly, 1966, p. 62.

with and further preventing racist notions and behaviours. Simply put, the measure is merely language.

In a moment of brutal honesty and existential reflection regarding the history and nature of the church, the general assembly adopted these resolute measures on racism and ethnic disparity in 2002, stating:

WHEREAS the Church of God from its inception has contended to be inclusive of peoples regardless of gender, cultural background or race; and

WHEREAS the 50th General Assembly in 1964 adopted a resolution on human rights affirming the worth of every individual; and

WHEREAS every race bears the image of God and has its origin in Adam who is the Father of all mankind; and

WHEREAS in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slaves nor free men, men nor women, but we are all one in Him; and

WHEREAS the Resolution on Leadership and World Vision in the 1990 General Assembly Minutes commits the church to be “international...transcending culture, race, nationalism, and politics”; and

WHEREAS we are beholden to a Christ like example and lifestyle, one of acceptance, affirmation, and unconditional love;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this International General Assembly recognizes all members of the body of Christ as equal in function and consequence, and every race and ethnic distinction a valuable and necessary field for the winning of souls and the furtherance of the kingdom of God upon this earth; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we commit towards the elimination of racism and bigotry, corporately identifying racism and bigotry as sinful hindrances which prevent

us from truly realizing brotherhood and Christian love within and outside the body of the international church and the many peoples and races which it reaches and encompasses (68th A., 2000, p. 89).¹²⁷

There must be a move from rhetoric to concrete development. What practical measures have the church taken to ensure the fulfilment of its resolute measures? What programs or initiatives have been adopted? How many minorities from the black and Hispanic church communities have been included in the leadership structure at the top levels since the creation of the resolutions? Furthermore, the resolutions lack reference to specific instances of past racism and to groups who have been the victims of the racism and bigotry. The resolution merely alludes to the problem and does not properly identify it. Moreover, recognition is not the same as an apology or an amending of past injustices. One might assume there is a problem of spiritualising issues, thus making practical measures difficult to create.

Theologian Donald Shriver notes that “forgetfulness is the enemy of justice, unless one takes refuge in that untrue truism: ‘There is nothing we can do to change the past.’”¹²⁸ On the contrary, Shriver challenges us to change our relation to the past. “The first step for doing so is uncovering its dreaded secrets. There can be no final burial of the past before an inquest.”¹²⁹ He urges communities not to forgive and forget, but rather to remember and forgive, noting that a tangible way of doing so is to have one’s unjust suffering entered into a public record as an increment of justice.¹³⁰

The William Turner Institute on Racial Reconciliation rightly recognizes that a central dilemma in the work of racial reconciliation is that of language and how it is often

¹²⁷ Church of God 68th General Assembly Minutes of 2000, p. 89.

¹²⁸ Quote is taken from a speech by the American theologian to a symposium at St Antony's College, Oxford, on forgiveness titled “Forgive, but never forget,” 1998.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

unintentionally used to blur, divide, and polarize what are essentially similar efforts.¹³¹

Without working definitions of the seemingly familiar terms of “justice” and “reconciliation,” progress is hindered.¹³² Muir also picks up on the importance of language in the reconciliatory process by noting the interpretation of terms such as “reconciliation,” “unity” and “internationalization” in the Church of God have theological, political, and practical implications.¹³³

The historical and cultural experience of the diverse communities which constitute the international “communion of saints” will, undoubtedly, inform the linguistic appropriation in the Church of God lexicography. What is needed is an interrogation of the language in the discourse between blacks and whites and its symbolic significance, also looking into the way it influences people’s attitudes toward each other. Moreover, this is further important as evidenced by similar problems of language in the discourse for equality that are echoed in Edwards and Solivan, especially in the former’s critique of the proposed *motion* on “Internationalization” in the Church of God passed nearly two decades ago.

4.11. Efforts to Rectify Racial Ecclesiology, Polity, and Behaviour

The efforts of the black caucus of the Church of God to rectify and solve the matters of race that beset the organization cannot be ignored. The Unity of the Spirit conference provides one example in the long battle toward racial equality in this classical Pentecostal denomination.

¹³¹ William Turner Institute for Racial Reconciliation, *Position Statement on Reconciliation*, <http://www.winterinstitute.org/pages/position-paper.htm> (April 2009).

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Muir, *Black Theology, Pentecostalism, and Racial Struggles in the Church of God*, p. 279.

Muir reports in his work that it was Dr. Samuel G. Ellis, a former director of the Black Ministries department who said of the church's spirit of marginalization and racism at the conference:

I must confess though that I am sad about two things: first the status of the Church at this present moment in history, as it stands with a cloud hovering overhead, that there is not a single person of colour that holds any elected office within the Church of God. Second, a friend of mine, Bishop Horace Hawes, who came to Lee College over thirty years ago with a black student who was barred from enrolling into the school. Bishop Hawes left the church subsequent to that, seeing racism at its ugliest. I am sad because a few weeks ago in January my friend died. It was his desire and prayer to come to Cleveland, Tennessee, and set foot on the campus of Lee College and hear the presentation...during this conference, to a place where he was denied entrance. One of his most challenging statements to me was: 'Ellis, don't leave; they desire you to leave so the same spirit of racism can rule the church.' He told me to stay within and fight the good fight of faith and God will do the healing.¹³⁴

The Unity of the Spirit conference by Church of God black ministers in Cleveland, TN was a follow up to the Memphis Miracle conference in 1994. Muir notes this conference's aim was to build upon the "Spirit of Memphis," to advocate for a change in the structure of power and representation in light of the Church's rhetoric and resolution on internationalization and racism.¹³⁵ While the Memphis miracle conference called for racial reconciliation for the black and white churches of North American Pentecostalism in general, the Unity of the Spirit conference called for racial reconciliation and recognition within the

¹³⁴ Muir, *Black Theology, Pentecostalism, and Racial Struggles in the Church of God*, pp. 302-303.

¹³⁵ Muir, p. 259.

Church of God in particular. However, what is striking is that the Unity of the Spirit conference was neither sanctioned nor supported by the Church of God general headquarters and key executive leaders did not participate.¹³⁶

The absence of Church of God officials and non-recognition of the conference by the Church begs serious questions for consideration about the nature of the church and its seriousness about racial reconciliation and harmony. This is especially true considering that the then general overseer Lamar Vest was in attendance and participated at the Memphis Miracle conference which preceded the Unity in Spirit Gathering.¹³⁷ Why were they not interested in addressing concrete issues of race that hit close to home? The Unity of the Spirit conference was held in Cleveland, Tennessee where the highest levels of leadership in the Church of God reside.

Vest publicly repented at the Memphis conference on behalf of the Church of God's past race issues and treatment of its black constituency.¹³⁸ However, there must be continuity between rhetoric and concrete results as the "feel good" moments of Memphis translated into little change for black folks in predominately white organizations.

At Memphis, black and white Pentecostal leaders came together to adopt a racial reconciliation manifesto. In a moving and apparently spontaneous moment, a white Assemblies of God pastor washed the feet of one of his black counterparts and a black bishop then did the same to Thomas E. Trask, the general superintendent of the Assemblies of God. Black and white Pentecostal leaders also formed a new umbrella group. Did anything change after the event in Memphis? At the Assemblies' biennial General Council August of 2008, Dr. Trask did not mention diversity in a keynote address about the seven challenges facing the

¹³⁶ Muir, *Black Theology, Pentecostalism, and Racial Struggles in the Church of God*, p.259.

¹³⁷ Muir's, *Racism and Reconciliation in Pentecostal Discourse*, p. 305.

¹³⁸ Ibid, pp. 251-256.

church in the 21st century.¹³⁹ In an interview, he said he never considered using last year's forum to spread the spirit of Memphis to his own constituents.¹⁴⁰ Instead, he spoke of the need for evangelism, fasting, prayer and Pentecostal passion.¹⁴¹ "I was addressing spiritual vitality," he said of his speech.¹⁴² "If the church has spiritual vitality, these other things will take care of themselves."¹⁴³ Clearly, theological differences are not the primary obstacle, though there are important racial variations in church governance, music, preaching, and liturgical structure. A larger issue may be control. "The only way we can include minorities in a significant way," said the Rev. David J. Moore, the Assemblies of God's director of intercultural ministries, "is for white people to surrender power, and that's tough."¹⁴⁴ Any change may have to start at the top.

To move toward a solution, an ecclesiology that emphasized the vital link between belief and practice is important for the formation of Christians whose lives are marked by behaviour seen to be in contradiction to the typical *status quo* in society. Therefore, there needs to be an affirmation of the church to act as a catalyst in the effort to arrive at an ecclesiology that cultivates a countercultural church that reflects the vision of God's kingdom, and not a church that allows its historically southern roots to act as an excuse for poor behaviour and identity.

At the Unity conference which Muir details in his thesis, Samuel Ellis says it is not only an appeal for the Church of God to understand the *kairos* (an ancient Greek word meaning the right or opportune moment) of the moment and the burden of organisational and personal decision-making: It is also about finding "a common ground" for equality in

¹³⁹ Kevin Sack, *The Pentecostal Church in America*, <http://partners.nytimes.com/library/national/race/060400sack-church-side.html> (April 2009).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

ministry and leadership, and avoiding the repetition of the racial politics and practices of the past. Unfortunately, such an understanding never arrived.

So then, how can one move to correct the wrongs of yesteryears without first acknowledging that there were wrongs? The process towards a corrective ecclesiology for the Church of God has not even begun. It is these issues that continue to provide a source of energy and strength for the divide between the black church of Florida and the rest of the denomination as a whole. Undoubtedly, the issue of separation in Florida is not just a result of social history, but it is also a result of a racial ecclesiology that still persists in the church today.

So what does this say about the Church of God and the issue of separation that persists within the organization? It suggests that the struggle to rectify an historical racialised ecclesiology continues.

4.12. REFLECTING ON R. DAVID MUIR AND RACIAL STRUGGLES IN THE CHURCH OF GOD

When focusing on the racial struggles in the Church of God, Dr. R. David Muir presents a number of issues which merit serious reflection of all who desire the abolishment of the shameful prejudice which continues to stain the history of the Church of God movement. I would like to begin my thoughts of Muir's work by highlighting those insights which he has correctly and justifiably advanced. First, Dr. Muir is accurate when he observes that any meaningful efforts at overcoming the legacy of racial tension and division must shift the linguistic paradigm from theology to practice. This simple declaration calls for the Church to act upon its discourse and dialogue. Simply put no more talking about racial reconciliation or equality but now it's time for policies and action that implements racial

reconciliation. We have had enough sermons and songs about love and unity, one must now react practically to the theology which the Church now espouses.

Secondly, Muir aptly addresses institutional racism in the Church of God and the phenomenology of denial. There needs to be an acknowledgement that many of the leaders both past and present aborted the true characteristics of early Pentecostalism that saw both whites and blacks worshipping together as equals and not as subordinates. As many racial reconciliation specialists points out, there is a need for the oppressor to rightly admit before the oppressed, all the instances and grievances of past oppression, or else both risk remaining in their current state.

Vinson Synan makes this point in his paper on a future strategy for racial reconciliation in American Pentecostalism, saying, “let us here today acknowledge our successes and failures as Pentecostal believers”. I would rather Synan had used the word ‘admission’ instead of ‘acknowledgment’ because admission linguistically places a stronger emphasis on verbal confession whereas acknowledgment simply recognizes past faults.

Thirdly, Muir notes that there is a need for resolving historic organizational inequality and arguments for succession. Resolving historic organizational inequality moves racial reconciliation from words to actions. This can be seen as an ecclesiastical form of reparations, although Muir does not frame it in this way. How does one resolve past organizational inequality?

Restorative justice comes to mind. It argues that applying restorative justice practices and principles could maximize justice for minority peoples by, first, refocusing reconciliatory efforts on the restoration of human respect and dignity rather than on the restoration of property rights or monetary payments, and second, acknowledging the wider social relationships in which such conflicts arise. I also contend that using restorative justice in situations of historical injustice, i.e. ecclesiastical instances may impact on the practice of

restorative justice itself. First, the roles and relationships of those involved will change which may lead ultimately to a reconsideration of the role of the superior to the subordinate in restorative justice. Second, applying restorative justice in situations of historical grievances highlights the collective nature of such conflicts and the collective, contextual nature of evolving notions of justice in restorative justice.

What does ecclesiastical restorative justice entail?

- 1) The advancement and placement of blacks or Hispanics in key ministry positions proportionate to that of either whites or the percentage population of non-whites groups to that of whites.
- 2) Funding of ministry resources for blacks and Hispanics proportionate to that of whites.
- 3) Equal involvement and participation of blacks and Hispanics in the General liturgy and services of the organization, i.e. General Assembly.
- 4) Proportionate coverage and visibility of blacks and Hispanics issues and concerns in Church publications and media resources to that of whites.

Fourthly, Pentecostal racial discourse must take place. I agree with Muir on this point that he relays in Chapter 4, however, I will take it a step further and offer ways in which discourse can take place. There is a need for intentional communal dialogue. Six things should take place in such dialogue:

- 1) Affirmation- an affirmation of the setting and dialogue taking place. Value should be placed on the need and importance of such discussion occurring.

- 2) Honest Dialogue- Openness must be welcomed and encouraged for participants to feel comfortable in opening up about racial feelings internalized.
- 3) Racial sensitivity- an understanding of the sociological concept of race and how it is experienced in Society at present.
- 4) Neglected Responsibility- seeing what sense of responsibility has not yet entered the conversation and accepting that we have all hurt one another
- 5) Extending a hand- the meaning of reconciliation as moving forward together and recognizing the healing value of apologies
- 6) Dialogue to Practice- calling participants to practical action to solidify insights and extend the benefits of the dialogue

In addition to this foundational work of dialogue, I propose that jurisdiction dialogues take place within districts with a gathering of two or three churches for a day or weekend in a retreat like setting.

Fifthly, in order for the Church of God to move meaningfully toward the goal of reconciliation the sociology of power in Church of God oligarchy must substantially change; culturally, the distribution of *prestige* positions must be allocated for blacks and Hispanics in proportion to that of Anglo-Americans.

Sixthly, transformations in polity and organisational culture remain impervious to the dignified arguments of black ministers in the US and NTCG leaders in the UK for a move towards an inclusive ecclesiology and away from structures which perpetuate ‘an ethos of parent-child role’.

Finally, there should be a recognition especially within a holiness rooted, classical Pentecostal denomination that Racism is a sin—a barrier to realizing God’s vision. Racism hurts all. It violates the image of God in us. Racism is present throughout our society,

including in our church and congregations. All societies, including our own, suffer from the debilitating effects of racism. Many of us do not understand racism, its effects, and how to undo racism. Institutions, cultures, and influential persons embody and transmit racism from one generation to another; therefore, we need to examine our individual roles, as well as our communities' roles in either maintaining or dismantling racism in our organization.

I would now like to point to some areas where perhaps I would go significantly beyond the observations of Muir which I mentioned to some degree previously, please allow further elaboration.

First, I want to apply the social theory of justice, restorative justice, to an ecclesiastical framework and understanding. I feel that restorative justice is a necessary component if true and lasting reconciliation is to take place within the Church of God. In principle, restorative justice is the action or process by which the person who has harmed takes responsibility for their actions and the person who has been harmed may take a central role in the process, in many instances receiving an apology and reparation directly or indirectly from the person who has caused them harm. Restorative justice has been a tool of social healing for ethnic communities oppressed and otherwise unfairly treated by societies at large. South Africa which with its long and documented history of apartheid has employed a certain forms of restorative justice, one form is the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) initiative. The BEE initiative was launched in 1994 by the post-apartheid government of South Africa following the birth of a new democracy and its objective is redressing equality issues and encouraging active participation of the black population of South Africa in the economic life of the country.

4.13. CONCLUSION: IS INTEGRATION THE SOLUTION?

We now come to the end of the study, but before we end it is only appropriate that in my conclusion I discuss the idea of integration.

I would like to challenge the notion of integration, because the scope of this work deals with separation and the opposite of separation is indeed integration, so it is only fitting that I offer a few thoughts on the integration of the black church in Florida with the predominantly white churches of the Florida-Tampa office.

What is meant by integration? At its core, does integration really work? Integration is the opposite of segregation; obviously in the context of the present study, segregation does not work and inherently breeds an imbalance of injustice and inequality. However, integration is often the pronto solution to segregation and separation of any type. But again, does integration really work? What is integration to begin with? Steve Biko, South African anti-apartheid hero is helpful to this discussion and provides keen insights into the questions and concerns of integration. With his voice we will explore for the next pages the meaning of integration and if it is the best/sole solution for the Church of God in Florida.

Integration is formally known by definition as “The making up or composition of a whole by adding together or combining the separate parts or elements; combination into an integral whole: a making a whole or entire.”¹⁴⁵ The definition of integration stems from the Latin word *integration-em* meaning only in sense ‘renewal, restoration to wholeness.’¹⁴⁶ Most noticeably integration is used in reference to the joining together of races and cultures separated or segregated both voluntarily and involuntarily.¹⁴⁷ Racial integration has brought the concept of integration into prominence with the civil rights era and groups like the

¹⁴⁵ “Integration.” The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed”. (Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 1065.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Stephan and Abigail Themstrom. *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1997), p. 114.

NAACP in the 1930's and 40's adopting a campaign to eliminate segregation and promote integration.¹⁴⁸ Thereafter, integration has been the solution to eliminating segregation in all its forms in various structures of society from schools to businesses to churches.

However, what has often resulted from integration is assimilation to a certain degree. Blacks are often absorbed into the structures of majority with little room given to equal participation and leadership responsibility. When there is a call for integration what is needed is not absorption of the races resulting in intermingling. However, what is needed is equal participation in all areas of Church life and government.

During the apartheid era in South Africa Steve Biko argued against a political compromise which was seen as integration and instead advocated a position that only 'once the various groups within a given community have asserted themselves to the point that mutual respect has to be shown then you have the ingredients for a true and meaningful integration'.¹⁴⁹ Biko reasoned that blacks suffered an inferiority complex resulting from 300 years of deliberate oppression, denigration, and derision.¹⁵⁰

One must immediately dispel the thought that integration is the best solution and means to an end. A whole new set of attitudes and self-consciousness on the part of both blacks and whites are needed in order to work towards a common understanding of equal participation. Truthfully, when integration takes place, the minority is still often subjugated to the majority and are left in a worst state than previously experienced because at least with separation they were in control of their own affairs and well-being.

This is the fear within the black church in Florida- that while the goal of integration is ideal and of noble caricature, the reality of equality under such circumstance is ever elusive.

For Biko Black consciousness as well as the changing of the black mentality is at the centre of successful integration practices as it pertains to blacks and whites. However, in a

¹⁴⁸ Themstrom, p.114.

¹⁴⁹ Steve Biko. *I Write What I Like. Selected writings*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

post-Biko world and in the context of the black church within the Church of God must be a non-racial consciousness towards integration and equal participation practices. Even Biko recognized the importance of non-racial versus multicultural. Multiculturalism is at the heart of any discussion of diversity and integration. However, fundamentally speaking, multiculturalism breeds an awareness of our differences; culture wise that is, whereas, the idea of non-racialism seeks to shun the attempts to look at race in the integration process. In his hopes of ending apartheid Biko once said, “We are looking forward to a non-racial, just and egalitarian society in which colour, creed, and race shall form no point of reference.”¹⁵¹

We must understand the dangers of multiculturalism as it relates to the discussion of integration. The first danger, multiculturalism relies on the acknowledgment of colour or race. By definition multiculturalism is the characteristics of a multicultural society; also the policy or process whereby the distinctive identities of the cultural groups within such a society are maintained or supported.¹⁵² We must be ever careful of becoming so culturally aware that we remain divided and separated even in the midst of so-called integration. This does not mean one should not recognize and promote diversity; however, we must be careful that in the name of cultural diversity we do not remain diverse. What good is integration, if still at a church convention or conference all the blacks sit together in the balcony and Hispanics sit together in their own section?

4.14. THE DANGERS OF INTEGRATION

Integration can easily lead to assimilation. Let us examine the definitions of the term at hand. Assimilation comes from the Latin word *assimilatio*, which means “to render similar.”

¹⁵¹ Steve Biko: *Black Consciousness in South Africa*; ed. Millard Arnold; Random House, New York. 1978.

¹⁵² “Multiculturalism, *n.*” *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 31 Jul. 2009 <<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/00181778>>.

There is inherent in assimilation the value of sameness. Therefore, what is at stake for the assimilated is a loss of two things: identity and independence. Identity is important, even crucial to the existence of blacks because blacks have struggled for their own sense of identity since the degrading era of slavery. There has always been a struggle for the black American between the black self and the American self.

The eminent black leader and cultural sociologist W.E.B. Dubois, one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colour People, was also organizer of the first Pan-African Congress after World War II. He was a boisterous advocate of black identity and heritage, so much so that being fed up with American prejudicial society, he moved to Ghana in 1961. In one of his more famous works *The Souls of Black Folk* he tells of the peculiar black identity, saying:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.¹⁵³

The forgoing analysis remains true even in light of the question of integration. A loss of identity means a loss of self. Black distinctives and cultural nuances are founded on identity; it is the very things that make the people who they are. Therefore, what is lost when

¹⁵³ W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, "Strivings of the Negro People" (The Atlantic Monthly, August, 1897).

assimilation takes place within the process of integration is the uniqueness of blacks' contribution to Pentecostal spirituality.

If integration is to take place, attention and care must be given not to allow the process of integration to be a mask for assimilation without an ecclesiastical and polity change from racial prejudice and systemic supremacy. If integration with equal participation of blacks in the power structures of the Church ever becomes a reality—it is then and only then can we utter the words of the Apostle Paul “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).”

Appendix

Chronology of the Black Work in Florida and the Church of God

1909— in autumn, Edmond Barr and wife Rebecca attended the Pleasant Grove Camp meeting and received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost

Barr returned to his native country the Bahamas in November bearing witness of his Pentecostal experience

On May 31, A.J Tomlinson granted both Edmond and Rebecca minister's licenses

1912—Barr became an ordained minister on June 3

1914—Barr was ordained as a Bishop

1915—Barr was appointed as the first state overseer of the black work in Florida

1916— Barr was replaced as overseer by Sam C. Perry

1922—As the black work grew in other parts of the country the office of “National Overseer” of the colour works with Thomas J. Richardson becoming the first to fill this position

1923—David La Fleur was appointed Overseer of the Colour Work

1925—The first Assembly of the Colour Work was called by La Fleur in Jacksonville, Florida

1926— The second annual Assembly was held in Miami, Florida

1927—The third Annual Convention convened at Sanford, Florida April 4-10

1928—The fourth Annual Assembly was held at West Palm Beach, Florida

The General Assembly of the Church of God agreed to allow a Colour Assembly, saying “That the Colour people be allowed to have a Colour Assembly and they still are and shall be recognized as the Church of God and that we all belong to the body of Christ (the Church of God). Neither shall it be construed that they are a body separate and apart from the General Assembly of the Churches of God. 21st A., F. 32.

David La Fleur resigns as overseer of the Colour Work

John H. Curry appointed Overseer of the Colour Work

1929—The Fifth Annual Assembly of the Church of God (Colour Work) convened at Orlando, Florida

1930—Sixth Annual Assembly convened at Jacksonville, Florida (in the Masonic Temple March 24-30, 1930)

1931—The Seventh Annual Assembly convened at Jacksonville, Florida (in the K. of P. Castle Hall) April 13-19, 1931.

1932—The Eighth Annual Assembly Convened at Jacksonville, Florida (in the unfinished basement of the Auditorium) April 18-24, 1932

1933—The Ninth Annual Assembly was held April 17-23, 1933

1934—Tenth Annual Assembly, April 9-15.

The Church of God Industrial Home and School was erected at Eustis, Florida and dedicated July 2, 1934

1935—Eleventh Annual Assembly, April 14-21, 1935

1936—Twelfth Annual Assembly, April 12-19, 1936

1937—Thirteenth Annual Assembly—April 12-18, 1937

1938—Fourteenth Annual Assembly—April, 1938

N.S. Marcelle was appointed the fourth Overseer of the Colour Work

1939—Fifteenth Annual Assembly—April 1939

1940—Sixteenth Annual Assembly-April 15-21, 1940

1941—Seventeenth Annual Assembly- May 4-11, 1941

1942—Eighteenth Annual Assembly—May 10-17, 1942

1943—Nineteenth Annual Assembly—May 16-23, 1943

1944—Twentieth Annual Assembly—May 8-14, 1944

1945—Twenty-first Annual Assembly—May 13-20, 1945

1946—Twenty-second Annual Assembly—May 12-19, 1946

W.L. Ford becomes the fifth Overseer of the Church of God Colour Work C.F. Bright is appointed General Secretary Treasury of the National Colour Work as well as Editor and Publisher

1947—Twenty - Third Annual Assembly - May 12, 1947

1948—Twenty-Fourth Annual Assembly May 9-16, 1948

1949—Twenty -Fifth Annual Assembly - May 15-22, 1949

George A. Wallace is appointed the sixth Overseer of the Colour Work

1950—Twenty-sixth Annual Assembly - May 21-28, 1950

1951—Twenty-seventh Annual Assembly - May 15-20. 1951

1952—Twenty-eighth Annual Assembly - May 11-18, 1952

1953—Twenty-ninth Annual Assembly - May 17-24, 1953

1954—Thirtieth Annual Assembly - May 16-23, 1954

The great Auditorium in Jacksonville, Florida was completed after over twenty years of planning and building

1955—Thirty-first Annual Assembly - May 15-22, 1955

1956—Thirty-second Annual Assembly held.

1957—Thirty-third Annual Assembly held.

1958—Thirty-fourth Annual Assembly- May 11-13, 1958.

J.T. Roberts, a white man, appointed Overseer of the Colour Work.

1964—The Church of God General Assembly passes a human rights resolution

1965—Roberts sign as Overseer of the Colour Work

David L. Lemons become the ninth Overseer of the Colour Work

1966—The Annual Assembly of the Church of God (Colour Work) of 1966 was omitted in order to allow the people to make preparation to attend the General Assembly in August of 1966.

“In the spirit of the human rights resolution of 1964, the General Assembly deemed it most necessary to discontinue the Annual Assembly of the Colour Work, stating:

WHEREAS any reference to the separation of ethnic or racial group in the Church of God is incongruent with the resolution on human rights passed at the 1964 General Assembly (1964 General Assembly Minutes, page 67, 68); and Whereas the section captioned “Colour” in the supplement of the 1964 General Assembly Minutes (page 18, 19) does not comply with the spirit of the Resolution:

WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND that the section designated “Colour” in the Minutes of the Fiftieth General Assembly of the Church of God is deleted. We Further Recommend that the general government practice of the Church of God obtain in all circumstances.”

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